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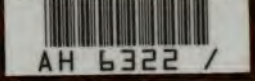
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AN

ESSAY

ON THE

INSPIRATION

OF THE

HOLY SCRIPTURES

OF THE

OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT.

BY JOHN D[illegible] A.M.
MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL IN SLATEFORD.

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PREFACE.

THE inſpiration of the holy Scriptures is a ſubject, on which it is of great importance to form juſt and accurate ideas. If they be the compoſitions of men, who, though honeſt, and upon the whole, well informed, were under no infallible aſſiſtance and direction, they are not entitled to the ſame reverence, as if they had been dictated by the Spirit of God; nor can we read them with the ſame confidence in their counſels and inſtructions. Their contents muſt be ſubjected to a ſtrict examination, and the truth of their doctrines muſt be aſcertained by other

other evidence than the authority of the writers, before we can yield to them a rational assent. It is evident that such a view of the Scriptures would involve us in endless enquiries and disputations, and by giving scope to unrestrained speculation, would favour the introduction of the wildest, and most contradictory opinions. There would be no fixed standard to which we could appeal. But if the sacred books be inspired, these inconveniences are obviated. All discussion is superseded, except with regard to their meaning; and as they are in general perspicuous, and easy to be understood, we may, by due application, attain the certain knowledge of the essential doctrines and duties of religion.

An attentive observer cannot have failed to remark a very striking peculiarity of the present times. It is the influence of the principles of infidelity upon many professors

profeſſors of the Chriſtian religion. The bold oppoſition made to ſome doctrines of revelation, renders them aſhamed, or afraid to avow them, without, at leaſt, ſuch qualifications and changes, as ſhall ſmooth their aſperities, and leſſen their apparent incredibility. In ſome inſtances ſuch conceſſions are made, as amount to a complete ſurrender of the point in debate. The inſpiration of the Scriptures is an article of our faith, againſt which infidels have directed all the arguments which their ingenuity could furniſh, and all the abuſe which their malice could invent. What is the conſequence? Many profeſſed champions of Chriſtianity ſeem to have concluded that the article is not tenable, becauſe it hath been furiouſly aſſailed; and accordingly they have abandoned it wholly, or in part, to the enemy. Few writers, indeed, who now undertake to defend the cauſe of revelation, hold the plenary inſpiration of the Scrip-

tures. That idea has become unfashionable; it is classed with other opinions of our fathers, which are exploded as the fooleries of enthusiasm, and superstitious credulity; and he only is reckoned to think rationally on the subject, who looks upon the sacred books as partly human, and partly inspired; as a heterogeneous compound of the oracles of God, and the stories and sentiments of men. There are even some, by whom this partial inspiration is denied, and the Scriptures are regarded as the writings of faithful, but fallible men, who had nothing to preserve them from error but the accuracy of their information, and the integrity of their hearts. The spirit of infidelity is working among Christians themselves.

The inspiration of the Scriptures is a point which Christians are too generally chargeable with taking upon trust. Few of them study the arguments by which it is evinced, and provide themselves with

answers

anſwers to the objections which infidels oppoſe to it. It is a doctrine which hath been received by tradition from their fathers, and which, upon their authority, the greater part believe to be true. We need not wonder, then, that, in a time of trial like the preſent, when the efforts of infidelity are unuſually bold and vigorous, there ſhould be a great falling away among the profeſſors of religion; nor can ſuch apoſtacy be deplored on any other ground, than as it affects the immortal intereſts of thoſe who are involved in it. It is attended with no real loſs to the cauſe of revelation, and it reflects no diſhonour upon it: for of what advantage are numbers, if they be deſtitute of principle; and what diſcredit can ariſe to the Scriptures from the deſertion of perſons, whoſe attachment was leſs the effect of deliberate choice than of accident? There is no reaſon for being alarmed, as if ſuch an event portended a general defection. Raw, undiſciplined

undiſciplined troops may give way at the firſt onſet; but veterans, ſkilled in the art of defence, and accuſtomed to danger, will keep the field, in defiance of the moſt furious attacks of the enemy.

It is unqueſtionably our duty to bewail the progreſs of unbelief and error; but we ought not, even during their greateſt triumph, to ſuffer our minds to ſink into deſpondency. The intereſts of truth are patronized by the Ruler of the world, who is able to render events, apparently the moſt adverſe, conducive to their proſperity; and who, by a ſublime and myſterious proceſs, is continually bringing good out of evil. May we not hope, that at this moment, God is purifying the church, by the agency of her enemies; and that, while their endeavours to deſtroy Chriſtianity ſhall ultimately ſerve to diffuſe it more widely, and eſtabliſh it more firmly, the immediate effect ſhall be, to render its friends more ſteady and courageous;

courageous; to give new vigour to their faith, and new ardour to their zeal? On the ſide of infidelity, numbers may increaſe; but the faithful will preſent a cloſer phalanx, which no menaces can intimidate, and no force can overcome.

When the importance of the ſubject, and the circumſtances of the times, are conſidered, no apology will be expected, for an attempt to illuſtrate and defend the inſpiration of the Scriptures. An apology may be neceſſary for the imperfect manner in which a point of ſuch magnitude is treated; but while the Author is ſenſible, that the execution is not equal either to the deſign, or to his own wiſhes, he will not, by affecting to depreciate his labours, incur the charge of preſenting to the Public, what he acknowledges to be unworthy of its notice. Of the reaſons which induced him firſt to diſcuſs the ſubject, in ſome ſermons preached to the Congregation

Congregation under his care, and afterwards to enlarge, and throw them into their preſent form, a detail could ſerve no valuable end, and ſhall therefore be ſuppreſſed. He has given a conciſe account of the arguments, which appeared to his own mind to prove, in the cleareſt and moſt convincing manner, the divine authority of the books of the Old and the New Teſtament. His labour will not be loſt, if the following Eſſay be the means of reclaiming any of thoſe unhappy perſons, who have exchanged Chriſtianity for that mixture of folly and impiety, which is arrogantly ſtyled reaſon and philoſophy; or of enabling any Chriſtian, who is expoſed to the aſſaults, and perplexed with the ſophiſtry of unbelievers, to "hold faſt the profeſſion of his faith without wavering."

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ERRATA.

P. 28. line laſt, for I. read IV.
P. 80. line 10. for *them* read *it.*
P. 94. line 3. for *them* read *it.*
P. 281. line 16. for *to* read *with.*

AN

ESSAY

ON THE

INSPIRATION

OF THE

HOLY SCRIPTURES.

INTRODUCTION AND PLAN.

REVELATION bears an analogy to the progreſs of light, which, faintly appearing in the dawn, brightens into the full ſplendour of noon; or to the progreſs of reaſon, which, feeble in infancy, and confined in its operations, becomes capable, in manhood, of the moſt profound reſearches, and embraces the whole circle of ſcience.

In the gradual manifeſtation of his will, the wiſdom of God was diſplayed. An intelligent parent, in inſtructing his children, accommodates himſelf to the weakneſs of their faculties; and, beginning with firſt principles, and ſimple elements, leads them on by ſucceſſive ſteps to perfection. In like manner, God communicated ſpiritual information, "in various portions," as the circumſtances of the church required; giving only, in the firſt ages, a few obſcure notices of good things to come, and enlarging the revelation, as the time fixed for the appearance of the Meſſiah approached. Having by the figures of the law, and the doctrine of the prophets, prepared the minds of men for a more perfect diſpenſation, he favoured them, "in the laſt days," with a final and complete declaration of his gracious counſels, by Jeſus Chriſt, who lay in his boſom, and, in his human nature, was qualified for his high office by the Holy Ghoſt, with whom he was anointed *.

The revelation made by the miniſtry of the prophets, and of Chriſt, was of ineſtimable advantage

* Heb. i. 1, 2. The word πολυμερῶς, which we tranſlate "at ſundry times," ſignifies, "in many parts or portions."

vantage to thoſe to whom it was immediately addreſſed, as it diſcloſed to them truths the moſt ſublime and intereſting, precepts the moſt ſalutary, and promiſes fraught with the ſweeteſt conſolations. But it was not intended ſolely for their benefit. It was the deſign of God, that mankind, in ſucceeding ages, ſhould ſhare in its bleſſings; and that, by means of it, all nations ſhould be taught, how they may glorify him in this world, and be admitted into his beatific preſence in the next.

This deſign would have been fruſtrated, if no effectual method had been adopted to preſerve the revelation. If, by the pious care of parents, and of the public teachers of religion, it might have been tranſmitted, in ſome degree of purity, to the generation immediately following; though this could have hardly been expected with regard either to the law of Moſes, or to the goſpel, each of which comprehends ſuch a variety of doctrines and facts, and ſuch a multiplicity of particulars; in the courſe of a few generations, ſo much of it would have been loſt, ſo many human dogmas and inventions would have been incorporated with it, and the parts which remained would have

have been so disfigured and adulterated, that the purpose for which it was given would have been entirely defeated. God, therefore, who foresaw all the evils which would ensue, if tradition were the only mode of conveying the knowledge of his will to future ages, hath not left us to search for the foundation of our faith, in obscure reports and narrations, in which the true and the fabulous are blended together. While he raised up certain persons to be the messengers and interpreters of his will, he usually employed them to commit their messages to writing. What is written, is not liable to be forgotten, nor so apt to be corrupted, as what depends for its preservation on the tenaciousness of the memories, and the honesty of the intentions of those in whose breasts it is deposited. It may pass from age to age, without sustaining any injury; and may reach the utmost limits of time, without material alteration. By this expedient, the revelation hath been preserved; and we who are now alive, enjoy it, in equal purity and integrity, as they did, who heard the prophets, or Christ and his apostles, with their own lips declaring the wonderful works of God.

The

The design of the following chapters is to state the arguments which make it reasonable in us to believe, that the books in which it is contained, were divinely inspired. Since we profess to look upon the Bible as the word of God, and assign to it an authority above every human composition, we should be able to give a satisfying account of this part of our conduct to any man that asks us. Paul affirms, in the second epistle to Timothy, that "all scripture is given by inspiration of God *;" but it will be easily perceived, that this assertion is not a sufficient reason, why we should believe the inspiration of the scriptures. The same claim is advanced by books, which we certainly know to have been written by wicked and designing men. According to the principles of common sense, and impartial reasoning, the testimony of the scriptures in their own favour ought not to be admitted, any more than the testimony of any other writing concerning itself, till we see it supported by satisfactory evidence. Their testimony, indeed, we know to be true; but of its truth no man can be fully assured, who hath not discovered such internal characters, or such exter-

* 2 Tim. iii. 16.

nal atteſtations, as amount to a proof of their heavenly original. If we believe their divinity without examination, in what reſpect do we differ from thoſe, who, on the authority of their anceſtors, or their prieſts, receive the Koran of Mahomet, or the ſacred books of any other nation, as revelations from God? With a faith ſo repugnant to reaſon, and ſo incapable of defence, how eaſily ſhall we be puzzled by the cavils, and bewildered by the ſophiſms of infidelity?

The boldneſs and activity of the enemies of revelation, are diſtinguiſhing features of the age. Formerly our religion was attacked with ſome reſerve, and the aſſailants found it expedient to conceal their purpoſe under a maſk of decency and reſpect; but now the infidel, with undaunted and unbluſhing front, proclaims aloud to the world his hoſtility to the goſpel. Impatient, too, of the limits, within which he was accuſtomed to confine his exertions, inſtead of addreſſing the great and the wealthy, he goes, with a ſpirit of proſelytiſm worthy of a better cauſe, in queſt of converts among the vulgar; and ſtrives, by ſpecious arguments, deliberate miſrepreſentation, confident aſſertions, ſcurrility, and ridicule, to pervert

pervert their judgments, and corrupt their hearts. When the danger increaſes, our vigilance ſhould be doubled, and our precautions ſhould be multiplied. The peril of the preſent times, therefore, loudly calls upon us to examine with care the evidences of our religion, and to acquaint ourſelves with the arguments, by which the inſpiration of the Scriptures is demonſtrated, that no man may ſpoil us, "through philoſophy and vain deceit," of that precious treaſure with which our moſt valuable earthly poſſeſſions deſerve not to be compared.

In order to aſſiſt thoſe, who may peruſe this eſſay, in conducting an enquiry ſo intereſting, I ſhall obſerve the following plan.

FIRST, I ſhall give an account of the inſpiration of the Scriptures; or ſhall ſhew in what ſenſe I believe them to be inſpired.

In the SECOND place, I ſhall point out the writings of which the inſpiration is aſſerted by the Chriſtian church; and aſſign ſome reaſons why we attribute a divine original to theſe alone.

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In the THIRD place, I shall prove the inspiration of the Scriptures, by a variety of arguments.

LASTLY, I shall consider the principal objections of infidels against their inspiration.

CHAP.

CHAP. I.

THE NATURE OF INSPIRATION; OR, THE SENSE IN WHICH WE BELIEVE THE SCRIPTURES TO BE INSPIRED.

I DEFINE inſpiration to be ſuch an influence of the Holy Ghoſt on the underſtandings, imaginations, memories, and other mental powers of the writers of the ſacred books, as perfectly qualified them for communicating to the world the knowledge of the will of God. The definition is expreſſed in general terms; and it will be neceſſary, therefore, in order to give clear and preciſe ideas of the ſubject, to deſcend to particulars.

Inſtead of retailing the opinions of others, I ſhall ſubmit to the conſideration of the reader, the following account of the inſpiration of the Scriptures:

I. There are many things in the Scriptures, which the writers might have known, and probably did know, by ordinary means. As perſons poſſeſſed

poſſeſſed of memory, judgment, and the other intellectual faculties which are common to men, they were able to relate certain events, in which they had been perſonally concerned; and to make ſuch occaſional reflections, as were ſuggeſted by particular ſubjects and occurrences. In theſe caſes, no ſupernatural influence was neceſſary to invigorate their minds: it was only neceſſary, that they ſhould be infallibly preſerved from error. It is with reſpect to ſuch paſſages of Scripture alone, as it did not exceed the natural ability of the writers to compoſe, that I would admit the notion of *ſuperintendence*, if it ſhould be admitted at all. Perhaps this word, though of eſtabliſhed uſe, and almoſt undiſputed authority, ſhould be entirely laid aſide, as inſufficient to expreſs even the loweſt degree of inſpiration. In the paſſages of Scripture which we are now conſidering, I conceive the writers to have been not merely ſuperintended, that they might commit no error, but likewiſe to have been moved, or excited by the Holy Ghoſt to record particular events, and ſet down particular obſervations. The paſſages written in conſequence of the direction, and under the care of the divine Spirit, may be ſaid, in

an

an inferior ſenſe, to be inſpired; whereas if the men had written them at the ſuggeſtion of their own ſpirit, they would not have poſſeſſed any more authority, though they had been free from error, than thoſe parts of profane writings, which are agreeable to truth.

II. There are other parts of the Scriptures, in which the faculties of the writers were ſupernaturally invigorated and elevated. It is impoſſible for us, and, perhaps, it was not poſſible for the inſpired perſon himſelf, to determine, where nature ended, and inſpiration began. It is enough to know, that there are many parts of Scripture, in which, though the unaſſiſted mind might have proceeded ſome ſteps, a divine impulſe was neceſſary to enable it to advance. I think, for example, that the Evangeliſts could not have written the hiſtory of Chriſt, if they had not enjoyed miraculous aid. Two of them, Matthew and John, accompanied our Saviour during the ſpace of three years and a half. At the cloſe of this period, or rather ſeveral years after it, when they wrote their goſpels, we may be certain that they had forgotten many of his diſcourſes and miracles; that they recollected others indiſtinctly; and

and that they would have been in danger of producing an inaccurate and unfair account, by confounding one thing with another. Beſides, from ſo large a maſs of particulars, men of uncultivated minds, who were not in the habit of diſtinguiſhing, and claſſifying, could not have made a proper ſelection; nor would perſons, unſkilled in the art of compoſition, have been able to expreſs themſelves in ſuch terms, as ſhould enſure a faithful repreſentation of doctrines and facts, and with ſuch dignity as the nature of the ſubject required. A divine influence, therefore, muſt have been exerted on their minds, by which their memories and judgments were ſtrengthened, and they were enabled to relate the doctrines and miracles of their Maſter, in a manner the beſt fitted to impreſs the readers of their hiſtories. The promiſe of the Holy Ghoſt to bring to their remembrance all things whatſoever Chriſt had ſaid to them *, proves, that in writing their hiſtories, their mental powers were endowed, by his agency, with more than uſual vigour.

Farther, it muſt be allowed, that, in ſeveral paſſages of Scripture, there is found ſuch elevation

* John xiv. 26.

tion of thought and of ſtyle, as clearly ſhews, that the powers of the writers were raiſed above their ordinary pitch. If a perſon of moderate talents ſhould give as elevated a deſcription of the majeſty and attributes of God, or reaſon as profoundly on the myſterious doctrines of religion, as a man of the moſt exalted genius, and extenſive learning, we could not fail to be convinced, that he was ſupernaturally aſſiſted; and the conviction would be ſtill ſtronger, if his compoſition ſhould far tranſcend the higheſt efforts of the human mind. Some of the ſacred writers were taken from the loweſt ranks of life; and yet ſentiments ſo dignified, and repreſentations of divine things ſo grand and majeſtic, occur in their writings, that the nobleſt flights of human genius, when compared with them, appear cold and inſipid.

III. It is manifeſt, with reſpect to many paſſages of Scripture, that the ſubjects, of which they treat, muſt have been directly revealed to the writers. They could not have been known by any natural means; nor was the knowledge of them attainable by a ſimple elevation of the faculties. With the faculties of an angel, we could not diſ-

cover the purpoſes of the divine mind. This degree of inſpiration we attribute to thoſe, who were empowered to reveal heavenly myſteries, "which eye had not ſeen, and ear had not heard;" to thoſe, who were ſent with particular meſſages from God to his people; and to thoſe who were employed to predict future events. The plan of redemption being an effect of the ſovereign counſels of heaven, it could not have been known but by a communication from the Father of lights.

This kind of inſpiration has been called the inſpiration of *ſuggeſtion*. It is needleſs to diſpute about a word; but *ſuggeſtion* ſeeming to expreſs an operation on the mind, by which ideas are excited in it, is of too limited ſignification to denote the various modes, in which the prophets and apoſtles were made acquainted with ſupernatural truths. God revealed himſelf to them, not only by ſuggeſtion, but by dreams, viſions, voices, and the miniſtry of angels. This degree of inſpiration, in ſtrict propriety of ſpeech, ſhould be called *revelation*; a word preferable to ſuggeſtion, becauſe it is expreſſive of all the ways, in which God communicated new ideas

ideas to the minds of his ſervants. It is a word, too, choſen by the Holy Ghoſt himſelf to ſignify the diſcovery of truths formerly unknown to the apoſtles. The laſt book of the New Teſtament, which is a collection of prophecies, is called the *revelation* of Jeſus Chriſt. Paul ſays that he received his goſpel by *revelation*; that "by *revelation* the myſtery was made known to him, which in other ages was not made known unto the ſons of men, as it was then *revealed* unto his holy apoſtles and prophets by the Spirit;" and in another place, having obſerved, that "eye had not ſeen, nor ear heard, neither had entered into the heart of man the things which God had prepared for them that love him," he adds, "But God hath *revealed* them unto us by his Spirit *."

I have not names to deſignate the other two kinds of inſpiration. The names uſed by Doddridge and others, Superintendence, Elevation, and Suggeſtion, do not convey the ideas ſtated in the three preceding particulars; and are liable to other objections, beſides thoſe which have been mentioned. This account of the inſpiration of the

* Rev. i. 1. Gal. i. 12. Eph. iii. 3. 5. 1 Cor. ii. 9, 10.

the Scriptures has, I think, these two recommendations, that there is no part of Scripture, which does not fall under one or other of the foregoing heads; and that the different degrees of the agency of the Divine Spirit, on the minds of the different writers, are carefully discriminated *.

Some men have adopted very strange, and dangerous notions respecting the inspiration of the Scriptures. Dr Priestley denies, that they were written by a particular divine inspiration, and asserts, that the writers, though men of the greatest probity, were

* According to the Jews, there were three kinds of inspiration, or modes of revelation. The books of Moses they ascribe to that kind of revelation, which they call *mouth to mouth*, or *face to face*, and in proof of which they quote, Numb. xii. 8. Some other books of the Old Testament proceeded from the *gift of prophecy*, of which they fancy several degrees corresponding to the different methods, which God used in revealing himself to the prophets. The remaining books were written by the *inspiration of the Holy Ghost*; and to these they give the name of the *holy writings*. That there was a difference in the kind, or degree of inspiration must be admitted; but this way of expressing it is inaccurate, and absurd. The whole Scripture, and not a particular part of it only, was written by the inspiration of the Spirit. Can any thing be more ridiculous than to say, that the two books of Kings were written by the spirit of prophecy; but that the two books of Chronicles, which so much resemble them, were written by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost?

were fallible, and have actually committed miſtakes in their narrations, and their reaſonings. We muſt not anticipate the arguments, which refute this opinion, whether advanced by a heretic or an infidel; and I ſhall, therefore, only obſerve, that this man and his followers find it their intereſt to weaken, and ſet aſide the authority of the Scriptures, as they have adopted a ſyſtem of religion, from which all the diſtinguiſhing doctrines of revelation are excluded. Others conſider the Scriptures as inſpired in thoſe places, where they profeſs to deliver the word of God; but in other places, eſpecially in the hiſtorical parts, they aſcribe to them only the ſame authority which is due to the writings of well-informed and upright men. But as this diſtinction is perfectly arbitrary, having no foundation in any thing ſaid by the ſacred writers themſelves, ſo it is liable to very material objections. It repreſents our Lord and his apoſtles, when they ſpoke of the Old Teſtament, as having atteſted, without any exception, or limitation, a number of books as divinely inſpired, while ſome of them were partly, and ſome were almoſt entirely human compoſitions. It ſuppoſes the writers of both

Teſtaments to have profanely mixed their own productions with the dictates of the Spirit; and to have paſſed the unhallowed compound on the world as genuine. In fact, by denying that they were conſtantly under infallible guidance, it leaves us utterly at a loſs to know when we ſhould, or ſhould not believe them. If they could blend their own ſtories with the revelations made to them, how can I be certain, that they have not, on ſome occaſions, publiſhed, in the name of God, ſentiments of their own, to which they were deſirous to gain credit and authority? Who will aſſure me of their perfect fidelity in drawing a line of diſtinction, between the divine and the human parts of their writings? The denial of the plenary inſpiration of the Scriptures tends to unſettle the foundations of our faith; involves us in doubt and perplexity; and leaves us no other method of aſcertaining how much we ſhould believe, but an appeal to reaſon. But when reaſon is inveſted with the authority of a judge, not only is revelation diſhonoured, and its Author inſulted, but the end for which it was given, is completely defeated.

A queſtion of very great importance demands our

our attention, while we are endeavouring to ſettle, with preciſion, the notion of the inſpiration of the Scriptures. It relates to the words, in which the ſacred writers have expreſſed their ideas. Some think, that, in the choice of words, they were left to their own diſcretion, and that the language is human, though the matter be divine; while others believe, that in their expreſſions, as well as in their ſentiments, they were under the infallible direction of the Spirit. It is the laſt opinion which appears to be moſt conformable to truth; and it may be ſupported by the following reaſoning.

Every man, who hath attended to the operations of his own mind, knows, that we think in words; or that when we form a train or combination of ideas, we clothe them with words; and that the ideas which are not thus clothed, are indiſtinct and confuſed. Let a man try to think upon any ſubject, moral or religious, without the aid of language, and he will either experience a total ceſſation of thought; or, as this ſeems impoſſible, at leaſt while we are awake, he will feel himſelf conſtrained, notwithſtanding his utmoſt endeavours, to have recourſe to words as the inſtrument

ſtrument of his mental operations. As a great part of the Scriptures was ſuggeſted or revealed to the writers; as the thoughts or ſentiments, which were perfectly new to them, were conveyed into their minds by the Spirit, it is plain that they muſt have been accompanied with words proper to expreſs them; and, conſequently, that the words were dictated by the ſame influence on the mind, which communicated the ideas. The ideas could not have come without the words, becauſe without them they could not have been conceived. A notion of the form and qualities of a material object, may be produced by ſubjecting it to our ſenſes; but there is no conceivable method of making us acquainted with new abſtract truths, or with things which do not lie within the ſphere of ſenſation, but by conveying to the mind, in ſome way or other, the words ſignificant of them. In all thoſe paſſages of Scripture, therefore, which were written by revelation, it is manifeſt, that the words were inſpired; and this is ſtill more evident, with reſpect to thoſe paſſages which the writers themſelves did not underſtand. No man could write an intelligible diſcourſe on a ſubject, which he does not underſtand, unleſs

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he were furniſhed with the words, as well as the ſentiments; and that the penmen of the Scriptures did not always underſtand what they wrote, might be ſafely inferred from the comparative darkneſs of the diſpenſation under which ſome of them lived; and is intimated by Peter when he ſays, that the prophets "enquired and ſearched diligently what, and what manner of time the Spirit of Chriſt which was in them did ſignify, when it teſtified beforehand the ſufferings of Chriſt, and the glory that ſhould follow *."

In other paſſages of Scripture, thoſe not excepted in which the writers relate ſuch things as had fallen within the compaſs of their own knowledge, we will be diſpoſed to believe, that the words are inſpired, if we calmly and ſeriouſly weigh the following conſiderations. If Chriſt promiſed to his diſciples, that when they were brought before kings and governors for his ſake, "it ſhould be given them in that ſame hour what they ſhould ſpeak, and that the Spirit of their Father ſhould ſpeak in them †;" a promiſe, which cannot be reaſonably underſtood to ſignify leſs

* 1 Pet. i. 10, 11.

† Matth. x. 19, 20. Luke xii. 11, 12.

leſs than that both words and ſentiments ſhould be dictated to them; it is fully as credible, that they would be aſſiſted, in the ſame manner, when they wrote, eſpecially as the record was to laſt through all ages, and to be a rule of faith to all the nations of the earth. Paul affirms, that he, and the other apoſtles, ſpoke, "not in the words which man's wiſdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghoſt taught *;" and this general aſſertion may be applied to their writings, as well as to their ſermons. Beſides, every perſon, who hath reflected upon the ſubject, is aware of the importance of a proper ſelection of words in expreſſing our ſentiments; and knows how eaſy it is for a heedleſs or unſkilful perſon, not only to injure the beauty, and weaken the efficacy of a diſcourſe, by the impropriety of his language, but by ſubſtituting one word for another, to which it ſeems to be equivalent, to alter the meaning, and perhaps render it totally different. If then, the ſacred writers had not been directed in the choice of words, how could we have been aſſured, that thoſe, which they have choſen, were the moſt proper? Is it not poſſible, nay, is it not certain, that

* 1 Cor. ii. 13.

that they would have ſometimes expreſſed themſelves inaccurately, as many of them were illiterate; and by conſequence, would have obſcured and miſrepreſented the truth? In this caſe, how could our faith have ſecurely reſted on their teſtimony? Would not the ſuſpicion of error in their writings have rendered it neceſſary, before we received them, to try them by the ſtandard of reaſon; and would not the authority and the deſign of revelation have thus been overthrown? We muſt conclude, therefore, that the words of Scripture are from God, as well as the matter; or we ſhall charge him with a want of wiſdom, in tranſmitting his truths through a channel, by which they might have been, and moſt probably have been polluted.

To the inſpiration of the words, the difference in the ſtyle of the ſacred writers ſeems to be an objection; becauſe, if the Holy Ghoſt were the author of the words, the ſtyle might be expected to be uniformly the ſame. But, in anſwer to this objection, it may be obſerved, that the Divine Spirit, whoſe operations are various, might act differently on different perſons, according to the natural turn of their minds. He might enable

enable one man, for inſtance, to write more ſublimely than another, becauſe he was naturally of a more exalted genius than the other, and the ſubject aſſigned to him demanded more elevated language; or he might produce a difference in the ſtyle of the ſame man, by raiſing, at one time, his faculties above their ordinary ſtate, and by leaving them, at another, to act according to their native energy, under his inſpection and controul. We ſhould not ſuppoſe, that inſpiration, even in its higher degrees, deprived thoſe, who were the ſubjects of it, of the uſe of their faculties. They were, indeed, the organs of the Spirit; but they were conſcious, intelligent organs. They were dependent, but diſtinct agents; and the operation of their mental powers, though elevated and directed by ſuperior influence, was analogous to their ordinary mode of procedure. It is eaſy, therefore, to conceive, that the ſtyle of the writers of the Scriptures ſhould differ, juſt as it would have differed, if they had not been inſpired. A perfect uniformity of ſtyle could not have taken place, unleſs they had all been inſpired in the ſame degree, and by inſpiration their faculties had been completely ſuſpended; ſo that

that divine truths were conveyed by them, in the ſame paſſive manner, in which a pipe affords a paſſage to water, or a trumpet to the breath.

CHAP. II.

INSPIRED BOOKS——APOCRYPHAL BOOKS.

HAVING fixed the ſenſe, in which we aſſert that certain writings are inſpired, we proceed to aſcertain what theſe writings are. Many books have appeared in the world claiming a heavenly original; and there are many books, which, though they advance no ſuch claim, contain nothing but the pure doctrines, and holy precepts of religion. Yet among all theſe, we aſcribe inſpiration to thoſe alone, which are commonly called the Scriptures of the Old and New Teſtament; the firſt of theſe collections beginning with Geneſis, and ending with Malachi; the ſecond beginning with Matthew, and ending with the Revelation.

But why, it may be aſked, do we acknowledge theſe books, and theſe alone, to be divinely inſpired? Why from a multitude of claimants do we ſelect certain individuals, and allow them the excluſive

cluſive poſſeſſion of that authority, to which all make equal pretenſions? The only anſwer, which, in this ſtage of our enquiry, it is neceſſary to give, is, that no other books have been handed down to us as inſpired by the church, of whoſe duty it is an eſſential part, to point out to the obſervation of mankind, that genuine revelation, which hath been committed to her care. We deny, indeed, that the authority of the Scriptures depends on her teſtimony; but as they were entruſted to her as a ſacred depoſit, we conſider her teſtimony as furniſhing a ſtrong argument in favour of their inſpiration. The ancient church undoubtedly obſerved what books were delivered to her by prophets and apoſtles; and as we have no reaſon to think, that ſhe ſuffered herſelf to be deceived, ſo there is no ground to ſuſpect any deſign, on her part, to impoſe upon us *.

* We find Cyril of Jeruſalem directing thoſe, to whom he addreſſed his catachetical diſcourſes, to learn from the church the inſpired books, as diſtinguiſhed from the apocrypha!. Καὶ φιλομαθὴς ἐπίγνωθι περὶ τῆς ἐκκλησίας, ποῖαι μέν εἰσιν αἱ τῆς παλαιᾶς διαθήκης βιβλοι, ποῖαι δὲ τῆς καινῆς· καὶ μοι μηδὲν τῶν ἀποκρύφων ἀναγίνωσκε. Cyril. Catachet. IV.

I ſhall ſeparately conſider the grounds, on which we receive that preciſe number of books, which the Old and the New Teſtament contain.

On looking into the decrees of councils, and the writings of the fathers, we find that the books, at preſent known under the general title of the New Teſtament, are the only books, of which the divine authority was acknowledged by thoſe, who living near the age of the writers, had the beſt means of aſcertaining their original; the only books which were admitted by the church, as canonical. This point hath been fully proved by learned men, who have undertaken to illuſtrate the ſubject, by quotations from the ancient Chriſtian records.

There is no reaſon to ſuſpect, that the Chriſtians, in the early ages, were careleſs in an affair of ſuch magnitude, and received books into the canon, or rejected them at hazard. Whether the Scriptures of the New Teſtament were inſpired or not, their inſpiration was by them univerſally believed. They regarded them as the oracles of heaven, by which they were bound to regulate all their opinions and practices in religion; and on which they founded all their hopes

of future felicity. The rejection of a ſingle inſpired book, and the reception of a forged one, would have equally expoſed them, in their own apprehenſion, to eternal damnation. Their circumſtances too were peculiar, and contributed to render them cautious and exact in examining the Scriptures. Their attachment to the religion of Chriſt expoſed them to incredible hardſhips and ſufferings. But as no man will voluntarily ſubject himſelf to pains and loſſes, without the hope of a recompenſe; and as their expectations could only be realized, if the religion was true, and their ideas of it were juſt, we may be aſſured, that they exerciſed the utmoſt care in diſtinguiſhing the genuine records of it from all ſuch as were forged.

While theſe conſiderations make it highly probable, that the canon of the New Teſtament was not ſettled at random, but was framed in conſequence of prudent and diligent inveſtigation, we are able to produce ſome facts, which fully eſtabliſh this concluſion. We know, that in the early ages, there were many goſpels, and acts, and epiſtles, and revelations, beſides thoſe which we at preſent receive, claiming to have been written

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by inſpiration; ſuch as the acts of Paul, the goſpels of Peter and Thomas, the epiſtle of Barnabas, and the revelation of Peter, with many others, too tedious to be mentioned. We know likewiſe, that the authority of a few of the books, which we believe to be inſpired, was called in queſtion by ſome; as the epiſtles of James and Jude, the ſecond epiſtle of Peter, the ſecond and third epiſtle of John, the Revelation, and the epiſtle to the Hebrews, becauſe no name being prefixed to it, the writer was uncertain *. But theſe facts, inſtead of begetting any ſuſpicion in our minds, with reſpect to our preſent Scriptures, ſerve

* Euſeb. Hiſt. Lib. iii. cap. 25. In that chapter, Euſebius takes notice of three claſſes, or orders of books; thoſe which were univerſally acknowledged; thoſe which were called in queſtion by ſome, though received by many; and thoſe which were manifeſtly ſpurious. When enumerating the books, whoſe authority was diſputed, he does not mention the epiſtle to the Hebrews; but we learn from the third chapter of the ſame book, that ſome rejected it, from the notion that it was not written by Paul. He points out three marks, by which the ſpurious writings might be diſtinguiſhed from thoſe which were truly inſpired. Theſe are the ſtyle, ὁ τῆς φράσεως χαρακτὴρ; the ſentiment, ἡ γνώμη; and the purpoſe or ſcope of the matter contained in them, ἡ τῶν ἐν αὐτοῖς φερομένων προαίρεσις.

ſerve to confirm us in the belief, that they are authentic. They ſhow us, that the church did not raſhly give credit to every pretence of inſpiration, but that ſhe examined every ſuch pretence with the moſt ſcrupulous care; whence ſome books, which were really inſpired, were not at once received in every part of the Chriſtian world; and others, which bore the names of apoſtles, being found ſuppoſititious, were rejected. A ſpirit of diſcrimination was exerciſed; and we may have the greater confidence, therefore, in the canon which was finally agreed upon.

Similar reaſoning may be uſed with regard to the Old Teſtament. The Jews were impelled by the ſtrongeſt motives, to employ the greateſt diligence in examining the grounds, on which the books, which were preſented to them as divine, reſted their claim. They entertained the ſame ideas, with the firſt Chriſtians, reſpecting the conſequences of embracing a falſe, and rejecting a true revelation. That they did not raſhly admit books into their canon, but received and excluded them, according as the evidences of their inſpiration were ſatisfactory or not, we learn from the caſe of the apocryphal books, of which

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we ſhall afterwards ſpeak. The books thus carefully diſtinguiſhed, they have delivered to the Chriſtian church; and we know that thoſe alone, which are now in our poſſeſſion, were acknowledged by them in the days of our Saviour. They arrange them in three claſſes, the law, the prophets, and the holy writings; and to this arrangement he ſeems to have alluded, when he ſaid to his diſciples, "Theſe are the words which I ſpake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things muſt be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moſes, and in the prophets, and in the pſalms, concerning me *." There is extant

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* John xxiv. 44. The law comprehends the five books of Moſes. The prophets are ſub-divided into the former and the latter. The former prophets are Joſhua, Judges, Samuel and Kings; the latter prophets are again diſtinguiſhed into the greater, Iſaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel; and the leſſer, Hoſea, Joel, Amos, &c. The holy writings are Pſalms, Proverbs, Job, Canticles, Ruth, Lamentations, Eccleſiaſtes, Eſther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, Chronicles. In the text quoted above, the Pſalms are put for the holy writings, probably becauſe they were the principal book, or occupied the firſt place in that diviſion. This claſſification affords but a poor ſpecimen of the judgment of its authors; for none, it may be preſumed, but themſelves, would have denied Daniel a place among the prophets, and ranked Ruth

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a Greek tranſlation of the Old Teſtament, known by the name of the Septuagint, or the tranſlation of the ſeventy, which was made before the Chriſtian æra; and in it is the exact number of books which is at preſent found in the Hebrew copies. Since the time of our Saviour, it hath not been in the power of the Jews, though they had been ſo diſpoſed, to add to, or take from the ancient canon, becauſe the cuſtody of the books hath been transferred to the Chriſtian church; nor, on the other hand, could the Chriſtian church have made any alteration, becauſe the Jews have watched her with a jealous eye, and would not have failed, from malignity as well as zeal, to exclaim againſt the unhallowed deed. Hence, at this moment, the Jews and we recogniſe the ſame books, as containing the revelation which God made to their fathers.

But beſides theſe, there are ſome other books, to which divine authority hath been aſſigned; and

rather than Judges or Samuel, among the holy writings. Dr Owen thinks, that, though the general diviſion be ancient, the preſent arrangement of the books is the work of the poſt-talmudical doctors, who had a regard, in making it, to the different degrees, or modes of revelation, mentioned in note, page 16. Owen on the Epiſtle to the Hebrews, Vol. I. Exercit. vii.

and of which, therefore, it is neceſſary to take notice, before we leave this part of the ſubject. The church of Rome, by her laſt council which met at Trent, hath placed, in the ſame rank with the law and the prophets, the following apocryphal books: Tobit, Judith, Wiſdom, Eccleſiaſticus, the firſt and ſecond book of the Maccabees, Baruch, with the additions to Eſther and Daniel*. By all Proteſtant churches, however, they are accounted mere human compoſitions; and, in defence of this judgment, the following reaſons may be advanced.

They were not acknowledged to be of divine authority by the Jews. This circumſtance is deciſive. If they were not received by thoſe, to whom the oracles of God were committed, and who were never blamed for rejecting any of his oracles, what right has any council, or any individual,

* Vide Canones et Decreta Concilii Tridentini, Seſſ. Quart. There are ſome other apocryphal books; but thoſe which have been named, are the only ones ſanctioned by the council. Its words are worthy to be tranſcribed. "Si quis libros ipſos integros, cum omnibus ſuis partibus, (with the ſtories, no doubt, of the ſparrow's dung, which fell on the eyes of Tobit, and of the heart and liver of the fiſh, the ſmoke of which frightened the devil,) pro ſacris et canonicis non ſuſceperit,——anathema ſit.

individual, under the preſent diſpenſation, to aſſign them a place among the canonical writings? In confirmation of this argument, it may be remarked, that they are not written, either in pure Hebrew, or in that mixed dialect which was ſpoken after the captivity, but in Greek; and it is highly improbable, that God would deliver any part of revelation to his people in a language which they did not underſtand.

They were written after the days of Malachi, in whom, according to the univerſal teſtimony of the Jews, the ſpirit of prophecy ceaſed, and who not obſcurely hints, that after him no prophet ſhould ariſe, till the Baptiſt appeared in the ſpirit and power of Elijah *. The vain pretence, in the book of Wiſdom, that it was written by Solomon, is an additional proof, that it is not inſpired, becauſe the pretence is manifeſtly falſe. In another part of the book, the writer repreſents the Iſraelites as in ſubjection to their enemies; whereas we know, that during the reign of Solomon, they enjoyed peace and proſperity †.

No part of them is quoted by Chriſt or his apoſtles. Indeed, all the books of the Old Teſtament

* Mal. iv. 4, 5, 6. † Wiſd. ix. 7, 8. xv. 14.

ſtament are not quoted, though the moſt of them are; and they are all recognized, as we have ſeen, under the general titles of the Law, the Prophets, and the Pſalms. Is it credible, that, if the apocryphal books were inſpired, not a ſentiment would be tranſcribed, not a paſſage would be produced as an authority from any of them, in the goſpels or epiſtles; and that not a ſingle word would be found in all the New Teſtament, from which it could be inferred, that ſuch books were in exiſtence?

They were not admitted into the canon of Scripture, during the firſt four centuries; and when they began to be uſed in the religious aſſemblies, they were read, as Jerom ſays, not for the confirmation of doctrine, but for the edification of the common people,——"ad ædificationem plebis, non ad authoritatem dogmatum confirmandam." Even the council of Carthage, which met in the early part of the fifth century, and placed the apocryphal books among the canonical ſcriptures, has been ſuppoſed to uſe the word *canonical* in that looſe ſenſe, which was ſometimes annexed to it by the fathers, when they applied it to all thoſe books, which might

be read in the church *. It is certain, that the ſame council ſeems to aſcribe divine authority excluſively to the undiſputed ſcriptures of the Old and New Teſtament, when it declares, in a preceding unanimous decree, the danger of the man, who acts in oppoſition to the prophets, and the goſpels †.

Not one of the writers, in direct terms, advances a claim to inſpiration; and ſome of them ſay ſuch things, as amount to an acknowledgment that they were not inſpired. The ſon of Sirach begs the reader to pardon any faults which he may have committed, in tranſlating the work of his grandfather into Greek ‡. It is acknowledged in two places of the firſt book of the Maccabees, that there was no prophet in Iſrael ||. The ſecond book is a profeſſed abridgment of five books of Jaſon of Cyrene §; and the author concludes with the following words, which are unworthy of

* Vide Codic. Canon. Eccleſ. Africanæ, Can. xxiv.

† Vide Can. v. Univerſum Concilium dixit. Nemo contra prophetas, nemo contra evangelia facit ſine periculo.

‡ Prologue to Eccleſiaſt.

|| 1 Maccab. iv. 46. ix. 27.

§ 2 Maccab. ii. 23.

of a perſon who wrote by inſpiration: "If I have done well, and as is fitting the ſtory, it is that which I deſired; but if ſlenderly and meanly, it is that which I could attain unto *."

Laſtly, the apocryphal books contain fables, lies, and contradictions. The ſtory of Judith is, on good grounds, pronounced to be a fiction. After the return of the Jews from captivity, when it is ſaid to have happened, there was no Nabuchodonoſor, king of Aſſyria, by whoſe army their land could be invaded. The moſt remarkable incidents in Tobit are exactly on a level, in point of probability, with the tales which amuſed our childhood. Antiochus is ſaid, in the firſt book of the Maccabees, to have died in Babylon †; but, in the ſecond, to have been ſlain in the temple of Nanea, in Perſia; and again, to have died in a ſtrange country, in the mountains ‡. Several other inſtances of falſehood and contradiction might be added.

Before we cloſe this chapter, it will be proper to make a few remarks, on a queſtion intimately connected

* 2 Maccab. xv. 38. † 1 Maccab. vi. 4. 16.

‡ 2 Maccab. i. 13.—16. ix. 28.

connected with the preſent ſubject; namely, whether any inſpired books have been loſt.

With regard to the New Teſtament, there is no ground for imagining, that any of the books are now wanting of which it originally conſiſted *. But in the Old Teſtament, we read of ſeveral books, which are not at preſent found in the canon; as the book of Jaſher, the book of the wars of the Lord, the books of Nathan and Gad, and the book of Shemaiah the prophet, and Iddo the ſeer concerning genealogies. Before, however, the inference, for which the names of theſe books are quoted, can be fairly drawn, it muſt be proved, either that they were all inſpired, or that ſuch of them as were written by inſpiration, have periſhed. But while it is extremely fooliſh to conclude, that every book was inſpired, to which there is a reference in the Scriptures; the opinion of the Jews, and of many Chriſtian writers,

* From Coloſſians, chap. iv. 16. ſome have inferred, that Paul wrote an epiſtle to the Laodiceans, which, it is pretended, is ſtill in exiſtence. But that verſe ſpeaks of an epiſtle, not to the Laodiceans, but from Laodicea; and the epiſtle to the Laodiceans, which bears the name of Paul, is a mere cento, a thing patched up of ſentences from his other epiſtles, without any determinate end. Vide Witſium in Vita Pauli, Sect. xiv.

ters, is not improbable, that ſome of the books concerning which we are enquiring, are ſtill extant under other names, and conſtitute part of the books of Samuel and Kings. Our Lord, who reproved the Jews with ſo much fidelity, never charged them with having ſuffered any part of revelation to periſh; and he ſeems to aſſure us of the integrity of the Hebrew Scriptures, when he ſays, that "not one jot, nor one tittle, ſhall paſs from the law, till all be fulfilled *:" for the *law* ſignifies in this place, as we learn from the preceding verſe, and according to the ſenſe of the word in many other paſſages, not the five books of Moſes alone, but the whole ſyſtem of doctrines and precepts, which had been delivered to the church. If we believe in a providence, vigilant, active, and almighty, we can no more allow ourſelves to think, that it would permit any part of a revelation, which was intended to be a complete and perpetual rule of faith, to be loſt, than that it would ſuffer the light of the ſun to be extinguiſhed.

* Mat. v. 18.

CHAP. III.

THE INSPIRATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

WE have ſpoken, in the preceding chapter, of the *canonical* Scriptures, or thoſe writings which the church hath recognized, as conſtituting the only rule of faith and manners to the profeſſors of the Chriſtian religion. We do not mean, however, that our faith in them is founded in the care, with which ſhe hath diſcriminated them from other writings claiming inſpiration, and the decrees which ſhe hath publiſhed in their favour. It is a paradox, which none could believe, but thoſe who are able to digeſt the monſtrous figment of tranſubſtantiation, that the Scriptures derive all their authority from the church, which derives all her authority from them. On what grounds, it might be aſked, does the church aſſert their inſpiration? If it ſhould be anſwered, that

that the preſent church is poſſeſſed of traditional evidence from the teſtimony of the ancient fathers and doctors; aſcending through the intermediate ages, to the time when the books were firſt preſented to the world, we aſk again, by what conſiderations the primitive church was induced to receive them as inſpired? The evidences which ſatisfied the firſt Chriſtians, may ſatisfy us; and it is not reaſonable to demand, that leſs ſhould ſuffice us, while our intereſt is equally great as theirs in aſcertaining the truth. They were too wiſe to ſubmit, in ſo important a matter, to bare authority, or ſimple affirmation. Some of the evidences, indeed, which were preſented to them, being tranſient facts, cannot be ſubjected to the teſt of our ſenſes; but if it can be proved, that ſuch facts actually took place, the impreſſion made upon our minds, though it may not equal in vivacity the impreſſion made upon theirs, will be ſo ſtrong as to produce full conviction. The diſadvantage, which may be ſuppoſed to ariſe from our not having witneſſed the facts, is compenſated by a new ſpecies of evidence, which is the reſult of the progreſs of time, and the evolution of events; but which it was

impoſſible,

impoſſible, that thoſe, to whom the ſacred books were firſt preſented, could enjoy. The intelligent reader will eaſily perceive, that I allude to the evidence of prophecy.

The natural order of the books requires, that I ſhould, in the firſt place, bring arguments in ſupport of the inſpiration of the Old Teſtament. But though this method might, with propriety, be adopted, and, by proving the inſpiration of the Jewiſh, we would pave the way for proving that of the Chriſtian Scriptures; yet it will afterwards appear, that, by beginning with the New Teſtament, we ſhall more eaſily and effectually accompliſh our purpoſe.

In favour of the inſpiration of the New Teſtament, there are three proofs, which I ſhall illuſtrate in this, and the following chapter. The firſt is drawn from the credit, which the verbal teſtimony of the apoſtles concerning Jeſus Chriſt, obtained in the world; the ſecond, from the reception of their writings; and the third, from the contents of thoſe writings.

I. The inſpiration of the New Teſtament, may be inferred from the credit, which the teſtimony concerning

concerning Jesus Christ, emitted by the writers in the course of their public ministry, obtained. The design of the present argument is to shew, from the reception of their testimony, that they were accredited, attested messengers from God; and, by a natural and obvious inference, to demonstrate the divine authority of their writings. Its force will be more fully perceived from the subsequent illustration.

The apostles were competent witnesses of those facts which they attested, and on which the Christian religion is founded. Their testimony did not relate to certain abstract points, in forming a judgment of which, they might have been misled through the sophistry of others, or erred through their own inadvertence or incapacity; nor to events, which had happened before their birth, or in a distant region of the earth, and of which, therefore, they might have received false information. It respected facts which they had witnessed with their eyes, and with their ears. They had lived with Christ, during the whole time of his ministry; they had heard all his discourses, and seen all his wonderful works. The advantages which they enjoyed for ascertaining the truth

truth of thoſe things, which they publiſhed to others, are pointed out by one of them in the following words: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have ſeen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled of the word of life; (for the life was manifeſted, and we have ſeen it, and bear witneſs, and ſhow unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifeſted unto us): that which we have ſeen and heard declare we unto you *." In certain caſes, we refuſe to give credit, even to a perſon of unimpeachable integrity, becauſe he hath not had ſufficient opportunity to acquire a thorough acquaintance with his ſubject; but if any be diſpoſed to call in queſtion the teſtimony of the apoſtles, their doubts muſt ſpring from ſome other ſource than a well-founded ſuſpicion of partial, or inaccurate intelligence. What they ſaw and heard, they were fully qualified to relate.

The honeſty of the apoſtles, in the character of witneſſes to the truth of the Chriſtian religion, is not leſs evident than their competency. If none of thoſe motives, by which men are induced to

* 1 John i. 1,—3.

to bear falſe witneſs, can be conceived to have influenced them; if no ſatisfactory reaſon can be aſſigned for their conduct, but a conviction of the truth, he muſt be highly uncandid and unreaſonable, who ſuſpects their veracity. They were not prompted by a ſpirit of ambition, to form a ſcheme of immortalizing their names, by introducing a ſyſtem of faith, to be eſtabliſhed on the ruins of every other religion. Such a ſcheme was not likely to occur to perſons ſo mean and illiterate; and, though their views had been more aſpiring than their condition warrants us to ſuppoſe, they would have been deterred from ſeriouſly thinking of it, by the obvious impoſſibility of carrying it into effect. They were not ſtimulated by avarice; for they who had already forſaken all to follow their Maſter, could not hope to gain wealth in exchange, by a religion which taught men to deſpiſe it, and which few of the rich were likely to embrace. It was not the love of eaſe which allured them to ſubmit to labours which had no interruption, to perſecution in every city, to the ſcorn of the world, to impriſonment and death. They cannot be conceived to have acted from a mere wiſh to impoſe

poſe upon mankind; becauſe deceivers would not have contrived the pureſt, the moſt ſublime, the moſt benevolent religion, which the world ever ſaw; a religion, by which all falſehood and impoſture are forbidden under the penalty of everlaſting torments. In ſhort, to whatever motive we attribute their conduct, no rational account of it can be given, till we reſort to the ſuppoſition, that they were fully convinced of the truth of what they declared. In this caſe, we can conceive them to have renounced all temporal goods, and to have expoſed themſelves to all temporal ills, from an ardent and generous deſire to communicate to their fellow men the ineſtimable bleſſings of the goſpel; ſupported under all their toils and ſufferings, by the aſſurance of ſupernatural aid, and animated by the hope of a glorious recompenſe. But if their teſtimony was not true, their conduct is inexplicable, unleſs they were madmen or enthuſiaſts; and of either of theſe charges, the ſyſtem which they taught, and the whole of their deportment afford an eaſy and complete refutation. Madmen could not have deviſed a religion ſo full of wiſdom and order, in which duties grow ſo naturally out of principles;

and the various parts so admirably harmonize. Enthusiasts could not have talked so rationally on subjects so much calculated, as several topics in the gospel are, to inflame the imagination; nor have delivered a rule of life so well adapted to the circumstances of mankind, and so far removed from any thing excessive or overstrained; nor have displayed zeal tempered with so much prudence; nor have acted, on many trying occasions, with such uniform dignity, and unruffled composure.

Notwithstanding these considerations, however, which might have satisfied those, whom the apostles addressed, of their integrity, and are sufficient to put to silence the lying lips of infidelity, which brings against them a charge of imposture, I hesitate not to assert, that their testimony would not have been believed, if they had not exhibited such evidence as demonstrated, that they acted by a divine commission; and, by necessary consequence, may convince us, that their writings were inspired.

Let us attend to some of the principal facts, which they attested, and of the doctrines which they founded upon them. They taught, that Jesus

Christ,

Christ, a man born of an obscure mother, who had lived in poverty, and died an ignominious death, was the Son of the Most High God; that having risen from the dead, he had ascended to heaven, and was now constituted the Lord of angels and men; that to believe in him was the only way to obtain the favour of God, and the enjoyment of eternal life; that men of all nations were bound to forsake the religion of their fathers, and embrace his gospel; and that, at the close of time, he would appear in the clouds of heaven, raise the dead from their graves, and judge all mankind, according to their works. It may be added, that on these doctrines they reared a system of moral precepts, which, however agreeable to right reason, must be acknowledged to be extremely uninviting to human nature, as governed by those propensities, and inclinations, which are felt and acknowledged in every age, and in every climate.

It is impossible to conceive a religion more repugnant than the Christian to the prejudices, and expectations of both Jews and Gentiles; of the Jews, who, misled by the figurative language of prophecy, which they interpreted under the influence

fluence of carnal affections, looked for a temporal Meſſiah, who would ſubdue their enemies, and put them in poſſeſſion of wealth and dominion; of the Greeks, who ſought after wiſdom, and deſpiſed every doctrine, which was not agreeable to the tenets of their philoſophy, and adorned with the beauties of eloquence. Was it probable, that men would renounce opinions, and practices, rendered venerable by the ſanction of their anceſtors for many ages; and abandon the religions, to which they had been inſpired with an early attachment, at the call of a few unknown, and unlettered perſons, who publiſhed doctrines ſo abhorrent to all their ideas, and ſo void of apparent credibility? Was it probable, that they would embrace a religion, which held out no proſpect of worldly advantage; but on the contrary, while it required from them the practice of the moſt painful duties, taught them to reckon upon the ſcorn and ill uſage of the world as their preſent reward? Their converſion was ſo highly improbable, that a man of prudence and ſagacity would have thought himſelf fully warranted to predict complete diſappointment, as the iſſue of the labours of the apoſtles. Yet we

know,

know, that their endeavours to turn the world to the faith, were crowned with the moſt aſtoniſhing ſucceſs. Myriads of Jews and Gentiles, notwithſtanding the ſcandal of his croſs, acknowledged the divinity, and meſſiahſhip of Jeſus; and became his diſciples at the riſk of every thing, which is accounted dear, and valuable among men.

How, then, ſhall we account for ſo ſingular an event? Either we muſt ſuppoſe that mankind, in that age, were not governed by the ſame motives, which are obſerved to influence them in every other age; or we muſt conclude, that the apoſtles exhibited ſuch evidence of the truth of the goſpel, as perfectly ſatisfied them, and triumphed over their prejudices. And what elſe could that evidence be, but the miracles recorded in the New Teſtament? The firſt preachers of Chriſtianity could not demonſtrate its truth, by the principles of reaſon; and its intrinſic excellence was not of a kind to be perceived, and reliſhed, at leaſt in the firſt inſtance, by thoſe whom they addreſſed. Some proof of eaſy apprehenſion, ſome evidence which would ſtrike the dulleſt, and convince the moſt prejudiced, was requiſite; and

of these qualities, the evidence of miracles is eminently possessed. If the miracles be denied, their success is altogether inexplicable; and as Chrysostom says, "If without miracles they persuaded the world, this is the greatest miracle of all." The denial of the miracles is the more unreasonable, because, while a certain effect is allowed to have been produced, the only cause which could satisfactorily account for it, is not admitted.

I beg the reader to bestow a little attention on this matter. By a miracle, I mean a work, which no man could perform, unless God were with him; a work superior, or contrary to the laws of nature, which God, or some being commissioned by him, performs, when certain words are spoken, or some sign is given by the person, whose character and doctrine the miracle is meant to attest. I acknowledge, that we ought not rashly to believe, that miracles have been wrought, because such events are out of the ordinary course of nature, and abstractly considered, therefore, are improbable; and because the most fatal consequences might flow from admitting, without sufficient evidence, that a person is a messenger from God. But such circumstances may

may accompany the report of a miracle, as ſhall render it abſolutely unreaſonable not to believe it. If the miracle be ſaid to have produced a change in human affairs, which change we find to have actually taken place; if the change be of ſuch a nature, that no cauſe was ſufficient to effect it but the miracle, its truth can no more be called in queſtion, than the ſtate of things founded upon it. Now this is exactly the caſe of the miracles of the apoſtles. The moſt aſtoniſhing revolution in the hiſtory of mankind, is ſaid to have been accompliſhed by them, or by their doctrine as confirmed by them; the fact itſelf is indiſputable; and the ſuppoſition of their miracles is the only theory which will account for it, in a ſatisfactory manner. All the other cauſes, to which the progreſs of Chriſtianity hath been aſcribed, are manifeſtly inadequate. If their miracles appear improbable, when viewed by themſelves, they are probable, and even highly credible, when conſidered in connection with their ſucceſs; or rather we may pronounce them to be certain. In fact, we are reduced to this alternative, either to believe that the greateſt revolution in the world was effected without any

adequate

adequate cauſe; or to admit their miracles, which afford a ſimple and ſatisfying explanation of it.

If then the apoſtles, as the caſe obliges us to grant, were endowed with a power of performing miraculous works, God teſtified his approbation of them in their public capacity. Miracles were the ſeals of heaven appended to their commiſſion; tokens, that they were its friends and favourites; ſigns, which not only awakened the attention, but proved that they were ſupernaturally aſſiſted. It follows, that their doctrine was from God; for nothing can be more certain, than that he would not have given them a power to controul the laws of nature; or to ſpeak more conformably to truth, that he would not himſelf have controuled the laws of nature at their command, that they might ſucceſsfully propagate lies in his name. God would not have given the viſions of their brain the higheſt atteſtation which he can give to his own oracles. What they ſpoke, therefore, God ſpoke by them, as what is ſaid by an ambaſſador, in conformity to his inſtructions, is underſtood to be ſaid by the king his maſter. But if the doctrine which they

preached

preached was divine, their writings are of equal authority, not only becauſe they contain a ſummary of the doctrine, but becauſe the ſame miracles, which atteſted their ſermons, atteſted likewiſe their goſpels and epiſtles. Their miracles atteſted all their inſtructions, whether verbal or written. They proved their authority in general, to make a revelation to mankind; and conſequently proved, that in whatever form, or by whatever means, they made it, by the tongue or by the pen, by ſpoken or by written diſcourſes, they were alike entitled to credit.

It would diſcover caprice and childiſhneſs to draw a line of diſtinction between their diſcourſes, and their writings; and to ſay that the former were inſpired, but that the latter were the unaſſiſted productions of their faculties. We muſt either deny, or admit the inſpiration of both. It is evidently abſurd to ſuppoſe, that God gave them his commiſſion, when they were to preach, but withdrew it, when they were to write for the benefit of all ſucceeding generations; or that he enabled them to work miracles to convince us that they were his meſſengers, and yet did not guide them by his Spirit, in committing their meſſage

meſſage to writing. Surely if it was of importance, that the apoſtles ſhould be preſerved from all error in preaching the goſpel, it was of more importance, that they ſhould be under infallible direction in framing thoſe books, from which men, in all ages and countries, would draw their notions of the Chriſtian religion. An error in one of their diſcourſes might have miſled a few hundreds or thouſands, and could have been retracted on another occaſion; but an error in their books would have been productive of the moſt pernicious effects to the end of the world, and could not have been corrected without a new revelation. Beſides, as no man can aſſign a reaſon, why the atteſtation of their divine commiſſion by miracles ſhould be ſuppoſed to have terminated, when they ceaſed to ſpeak, and began to write, ſo no man, in his ſenſes, will entertain an idea of revelation ſo perfectly ridiculous. All the miracles, then, which were wrought in confirmation of the goſpel, muſt be conſidered as having been wrought in confirmation of the books, in which the goſpel is recorded. God hath ſet his ſeal to them. He hath aſſured us, that they contain his word, and nothing but his word; and by conſequence,

quence, that the perſons who wrote them were inſpired.

This reaſoning, I am diſpoſed to think, would not be diſputed by a candid infidel. It is probable, that if he could be once thoroughly convinced, that the writers of the New Teſtament wrought miracles, he would acknowledge, notwithſtanding ſome remaining difficulties, their books to be inſpired. It is diſputed, however, by Socinians, who, granting that the apoſtles performed miracles in confirmation of their doctrine, deny the inſpiration of their writings. I wonder, if the opinion of theſe men be juſt, for what purpoſe the miracles were wrought. If a miracle, beſides proving that the perſon who works it, is a meſſenger from God, do not farther prove, that he is ſo diſpoſed and aſſiſted by a divine influence upon his mind, as to relate his meſſage with unerring exactneſs, it ſeems to me to be no better than a prodigy or ſtrange ſight, calculated only to ſurpriſe or to amuſe us. I am not able to conceive any thing more irrational, and I will add, more derogatory to the honour of God, than to aſſert, that he performed a long ſeries of miracles to eſtabliſh the truth of a revelation, of which, however,

however, we have only a mere human record, interſperſed, as the above gentlemen ſay, with falſe reaſoning, prejudiced opinions, and wrong interpretations of paſſages of the Old Teſtament. What did the miracles atteſt? The religion of Chriſt. What is the religion of Chriſt? Truly, it is not very eaſy to tell, for we have no infallible account of it; but we muſt gueſs at it, as well as we can, from the books of the firſt preachers, who were honeſt men, indeed, but fallible; and who have been convicted by Dr Prieſtley of ſuch ignorance of logic, as ſometimes to have drawn concluſions, which the premiſes would not warrant. This, reader, is *rational* Chriſtianity; but if all this be true, the miracles of the goſpel are proofs, that God hath done many things in vain. There hath been a waſte of wonders to demonſtrate the truth of a revelation which might have been, and, if we will give credit to ſome confident aſſertions, hath been corrupted by the very perſons who were employed to publiſh it; while by a ſingle miracle more, the inſpiration of the publiſhers, the integrity and purity of the revelation, would have been ſecured; and thus there would have been an end

worthy

worthy of God, for which the other miracles were wrought.

This, then, is the first argument for the inspiration of the New Testament; and it seems to be concluſive. But as it is of the utmoſt importance, that our minds ſhould be well eſtabliſhed in the belief of the divine authority of the Scriptures, I ſhall prove this point in a manner ſomewhat different.

II. The reception of the books of the New Teſtament by thoſe to whom they were firſt preſented, is a proof of their inſpiration. In order to place this argument in a convincing light, it will be neceſſary to premiſe ſome obſervations reſpecting the perſons by whom the books were written, and the claim advanced in them.

In the firſt place, It is certain that the books of the New Teſtament were written by the perſons whoſe names they bear. Of this fact it is neceſſary that we ſhould be thoroughly convinced, becauſe if any ſuſpicion ſhould ariſe in our minds, that they are the productions of a later age than that of the apoſtles, the force of the preſent argument would be entirely deſtroyed. That the

books of the New Teſtament were written by the ſame perſons whoſe names are prefixed to them, is proved by the ſame ſort of evidence, which is employed to ſhew, that any other book, written in a former age, was the work of the perſon accounted its author. How do we know, for example, that the books which bear the name of Cicero, Plato, Ariſtotle, or any other ancient philoſopher, were really compoſed by them, but by the uniform teſtimony of all ſucceeding ages? In the ſame manner we know, that the goſpels of Matthew and John, and the epiſtles of Paul and Peter, are genuine. All ages have concurred in aſcribing them to theſe perſons. They are ſaid to have been the authors, not only by private individuals, but by councils ſolemnly aſſembled to decide on this point. We have the teſtimony of thoſe who had the beſt means of aſcertaining the truth, the Chriſtian writers who flouriſhed immediately or ſoon after their death. Nay, there is more complete evidence, that the books of the New Teſtament were written by thoſe men, to whom they are always aſcribed, than that any other ancient books, thoſe of the Old Teſtament excepted, were compoſed by their reputed authors.

thors. Not only are they much more frequently quoted than any other books; but more perſons felt themſelves intereſted in aſcertaining that they were genuine, than in knowing the author of any other writing. It was a matter of importance only to a few, or rather of no real importance to any body, whether the works of Plato and Cicero were compoſed by theſe philoſophers; but the preſent peace, and the eternal ſalvation of thouſands and millions, the determination of innumerable controverſies, and the regulation of the faith and practice of the church in all ages and nations, depended on the certain knowledge, that the New Teſtament was written by the apoſtles and diſciples of Chriſt. There is not, therefore, any hiſtorical fact, in favour of which the evidence is more ample and ſatisfactory. We cannot doubt of it but on ſuch grounds, as would equally juſtify us in diſcrediting thoſe paſt events, which are moſt fully authenticated, and about which it would be deemed a ſymptom of derangement to be ſceptical.

I obſerve, in the ſecond place, that the writers of the New Teſtament aſſert, that they wrote by inſpiration. Their own inſpiration, indeed, is

not

not affirmed in expreſs terms by the evangeliſts; but ſuch things are ſaid in the goſpels, as may be fairly underſtood to imply it. They tell us, that Chriſt promiſed to ſend "the Spirit of truth to guide his diſciples into all truth," and "to bring all things to their remembrance, whatſoever he had ſaid unto them *." Now, by recording theſe promiſes, the ſacred hiſtorians not obſcurely inſinuate, that it was in virtue of their accompliſhment, or by the promiſed aſſiſtance of the Spirit, that they were enabled to give a faithful narrative of the words and works of their Maſter †. In the other books, the claim of inſpiration is brought forward in unequivocal language, and is often repeated. This is plain from the ſentence with

* John xvi. 13. xiv. 26.

† This reaſoning, it may be objected, will apply only to Matthew and John, who were apoſtles. But Mark and Luke were companions of the apoſtles, engaged in the ſame work with them, and hence we have every reaſon to believe, favoured with the ſame extraordinary aſſiſtance. The church hath always conſidered them as men endowed with apoſtolical gifts. The authority of their goſpels was never queſtioned; and it was a received opinion among the ancients, that they were ſanctioned by apoſtles; that of Luke by Paul, and that of Mark by Peter. Vid. Euſeb. Hiſt. Lib. ii. 14. iii. 4. vi. 25.

with which the epiſtles uſually begin. The writers ſtyle themſelves apoſtles of Chriſt; a title which ſignifies that they were his meſſengers, who ſpoke in his name, and by his authority. In the body of the epiſtles, there are many paſſages, in which the ſame thing is ſtill more explicitly aſſerted. Paul affirms, in the firſt epiſtle to the Corinthians, that "the things, which he and his brethren taught, God had revealed to them by his Spirit;" that "they had the mind of Chriſt;" and that "the things which he wrote, were the commandments of the Lord *;" in the epiſtle to the Galatians, that "the goſpel, which he preached, he had received by the revelation of Jeſus Chriſt †;" and in the firſt epiſtle to the Theſſalonians, that, "he who deſpiſed the things which he taught, deſpiſed not man but God, who had given to him his holy Spirit ‡." Peter places "the commandments delivered by the apoſtles," in the ſame rank with "the words of the holy prophets;" and claſſes the writings of Paul

* 1 Cor. ii. 9.—13. 16. xiv. 37.

† Gal. i. 11, 12.

‡ 1 Theſſ. iv. 8.

with the "other Scriptures *." John repreſents his own inſpiration, and that of his brethren as ſo manifeſt, that every man, who knew God, would liſten to them. "We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth us not. Hereby know we the ſpirit of truth and the ſpirit of error †." Theſe are not all the paſſages which might be quoted; but they may ſuffice as a ſpecimen. It cannot, therefore, be ſaid, that the inſpiration of the books of the New Teſtament is an idea, which ſucceeding ages have deviſed and propagated; for it is ſtated expreſsly and repeatedly by the writers themſelves.

From theſe two particulars I infer, that the reception of the books of the New Teſtament, by thoſe to whom they were addreſſed, is a proof, that the claim of inſpiration advanced in them is true. It is acknowledged, that, in different countries, certain books have been received as inſpired, though they were fabricated by artful and deſigning men. But either theſe books were impoſed upon mankind, in an age when they were too ignorant, and too credulous to be able, or willing

* 2 Pet. iii. 2. 15, 16. † 1 John iv. 6.

willing to examine their pretenſions; or they obtained credit by the arts and authority of civil rulers, who were themſelves, perhaps, the dupes of impoſture, or found it their intereſt, that their ſubjects ſhould be deceived. Both theſe cauſes contributed to make the Koran of Mahomet paſs for a divine revelation. If the Arabians had been enlightened by ſcience, and united in one great poliſhed ſociety, inſtead of being divided into a number of independent, barbarous tribes; if the light of learning and philoſophy had ſhined as brightly on the neighbouring nations, as it formerly did; and if no means had been employed to convert mankind to his religion, but evidence and perſuaſion, his claim to the character of a prophet would have been inſtantly rejected with violence, or with ſcorn; his religion would have ſcarcely ſpread beyond the limits of his own family, and the page of hiſtory would not have been ſtained with the name of the profligate impoſtor. The books of the New Teſtament were publiſhed in an enlightened age; were addreſſed to the Jews, who inveſtigated, with ſcrupulous diligence, every pretenſion to inſpiration, and to the Greeks, who were diſpoſed to treat

treat all such pretensions with contempt; and were the writings of men, who, instead of possessing rank and influence, were accounted the offscouring of the world. The doctrines contained in them, were neither calculated to flatter the passions, nor recommended by the charms of eloquence. The composition was simple and homely; and the religion which they taught, was contradictory to the prejudices of the Gentile and the Jew, and hostile to the vices of both.

By what means, then, did the claim of these books to inspiration come to be admitted? What induced those, to whom they were presented, to recognize them as divine, to sacrifice their preconceived opinions to their authority, and to submit to the rigid discipline, and the severe restraints which they imposed? To imagine that they admitted the claim without being satisfied of its truth, would be highly irrational. It was not an indolent assent to their divinity which was demanded. The acknowledgment of it was not a matter of mere speculation, but involved the most serious practical consequences; for by embracing the gospel they exposed themselves to the contempt and persecution of the world. All their

their interests were staked, all their hopes depended on the truth of their inspiration. Now I know of no conceivable way, in which they could be satisfied, but by seeing incontrovertible proof, that the writers acted, in composing their books, by a commission from heaven. The suspicion of some artifice employed by the writers to make their own inventions pass for a divine revelation, is banished by their known simplicity; nor could any artifice have succeeded so generally as the inspiration of their books was acknowledged. It was not in one place, or by one set of men only, that they were received; but among Heathens as well as Jews, at Athens and at Rome, and in all the chief cities of the empire, by the rich and by the poor, by the great and by the mean, by the wise and by the unwise, they were regarded with reverence as the oracles of God. The reception of the books, then, viewed in connection with their claim to inspiration, is a proof that the men of the apostolic age witnessed miracles performed by the writers, for by miracles alone could that claim be established; and, if they actually wrought miracles, the seal of heaven, as we proved under the first argument,

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was affixed to their writings, and their divine authority is placed beyond dispute. Thus we are again conducted to the conclusion, that the miracles recorded or alluded to in the New Testament, were really performed; and we can demand no better reason for receiving any book as a revelation from God, than his public and explicit testimony in its favour.

To set this argument in a still more convincing light, it may be observed, that the writers of the New Testament assert, in the presence of those to whom their books were directed, that they had given undeniable proof of their inspiration. The Gospels, and the Acts declare, that the apostles were endowed with a power of working miracles, for the express purpose of verifying their commission, and demonstrating their right to instruct mankind in faith and practice. Paul, in one of his epistles to the Corinthians, says to them, "Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs and wonders, and mighty deeds *." Other instances of the same kind might be quoted †. Now, for the

* 2 Cor. xii. 12.

† Gal. iii. 2. 1 Thess. i. 5. Heb. ii. 3, 4.

the illuſtration of this argument, let me aſk the following queſtion. If a man ſhould affirm that he was inſpired, and for proof ſhould affirm farther that he could work miracles, and had wrought them before the eyes of the perſons whom he addreſſed, would they allow his claim to inſpiration, if they had ſeen no miracles performed by him? No; they would reject him with abhorrence and contempt, as a vile and impudent impoſtor. He had appealed to evidence, which every man was capable of examining, and which, the ſenſes of every man told him, had failed. It follows, that if they ſhould admit his claim, others who were not preſent, would be warranted to conclude that they had witneſſed his miracles; and though they had not with their own eyes ſeen the proof, would act rationally in believing him to be inſpired. Let us apply this example to the caſe before us. The writers of the ſacred books tell thoſe to whom they delivered them, not only that they could work, but that they had wrought miracles to prove their own inſpiration. The reader is apprized, that miracles proved them to be apoſtles, or inſpired meſſengers of Chriſt; and it is needleſs to repeat

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the arguments which ſhew, that the writings of ſuch men ought to be conſidered as divine. By thoſe perſons, the inſpiration of their books was acknowledged; and does it not unavoidably follow, that they had been ſpectators of their miracles? The reception of the books in ſuch circumſtances amounts to a public and expreſs declaration on the part of the moſt unexceptionable judges, that the writers had claimed no power, of which they had not ſhown themſelves to be poſſeſſed.

There is yet another view which may be taken of this argument. Not only do the apoſtles affirm that they had wrought miracles in the preſence of thoſe to whom they wrote; but they ſpeak to them as themſelves poſſeſſed of miraculous gifts. The reader may conſult the twelfth, and the fourteenth chapter of the firſt epiſtle to the Corinthians. The ſame writer ſignifies to the Galatians, that they had received the "Spirit" by the hearing of faith, probably meaning his miraculous gifts*; and he warns the Hebrews againſt rejecting the goſpel, which had been confirmed to them by miracles and "gifts of

* Gal iii. 2.

of the Holy Ghoſt *." An impoſtor pretending to be endowed with the power of working miracles, might impoſe upon a ſtaring ignorant multitude, by ſome juggling tricks; but if he ſhould tell the ſame multitude, credulous and undiſcerning as they are, that he had imparted the ſame power to them, every man's conſciouſneſs would give the lie to the pretence. Finding, then, that Paul talks to the members of ſome Chriſtian churches as poſſeſſing, and exerciſing, and even, in ſome inſtances, abuſing ſupernatural gifts; and that his epiſtles were, notwithſtanding ſuch language, received not only as the letters of a man in his ſenſes, but as divinely inſpired, we have the moſt complete evidence, that ſuch extraordinary powers were really enjoyed. Had the Corinthians, or the Galatians known, that the gift of miracles, or of tongues had been communicated to none in their ſocieties, they would have treated him and his writings with deriſion. But now it being manifeſt that miraculous gifts were common in the primitive church, we perceive a ſufficient reaſon, why the writings of the apoſtles were then received, and ſhould ſtill be

* Heb. ii. 3, 4.

regarded by us as divine. The miraculous gifts were imparted by their miniſtry; and were expreſs teſtimonies, therefore, that their doctrine, whether ſpoken or written, was from God. They followed the reception of the goſpel preached by theſe ambaſſadors of Chriſt; and were uſually given by the impoſition of their hands *.

By this, and the preceding argument, we are furniſhed with the moſt deciſive evidence, that the Chriſtian Scriptures, at the time when they were publiſhed, were recognized by God as exhibiting a revelation of his will; and in ſubmitting to them, therefore, as the rule of our faith, we follow no cunningly deviſed fable.

* Acts viii. 14,---17. xix. 6.

CHAP.

CHAP. IV.

THE SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED.

THE arguments, in the laſt chapter, reſpected the external evidence of the inſpiration of the New Teſtament. In this chapter, I ſhall conſider the internal proof of the ſame point, which may be collected from its contents. And, ſurely, it is no leſs manifeſt, that a book hath been drawn up by ſupernatural aſſiſtance, when its ſentiments and compoſition tranſcend the known abilities of the writer, and are even ſuperior to every thing human, than when ſuch works are performed by him as ſhew that he enjoys the preſence, and acts by the authority of God.

III. The books of the New Teſtament could not have contained ſuch things as they do contain, if the writers had not been inſpired. We appeal to the writings themſelves for evidence that they

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are not, and could not be the production of the perſons, to whom they are aſcribed, nor indeed of any mortal whatever. The argument for their inſpiration, derived from their matter, comprehends theſe particulars,—the character of Chriſt,—the ſyſtem of doctrine,—and the prophecies found in them.

1. The character of Chriſt, drawn by the writers of the New Teſtament, may be conſidered in the firſt place.

To us who have been accuſtomed to read and hear deſcriptions of it from our earlieſt years, his character is perfectly familiar. But let us ſuppoſe a man, for the firſt time, to open the New Teſtament, and peruſe the account given of our Saviour by the evangeliſts. It is beyond doubt, that he would be filled with aſtoniſhment at a character ſo different from all that he had ever witneſſed, all that he had ever heard of, all that the human imagination, ſo fertile in forming new combinations, had ever pourtrayed. The idea of an incarnate God would ſtrike him as perfectly new; and he would be no leſs ſurpriſed at the delineation of his conduct. Had the character of Chriſt been a fiction of the ſacred

ered writers, a creature of their own fancy, they would have debaſed his divinity by attributing to him the paſſions and culpable weakneſſes of mortals; or they would have exalted his human nature too high, by majeſtic and overpowering diſplays of his divinity. But there is this ſingularity in his character, as drawn by the evangeliſts, that while he is elevated above all men, by the uniform dignity of his behaviour, the wiſdom of his diſcourſes, and his miracles, which ſhewed that all nature was obedient to his will; he is, at the ſame time, exhibited as ſubject to the ſinleſs infirmities of our nature, and influenced by its innocent paſſions. Such a character commands at once our reverence and our love, our homage and our confidence, and is exactly ſuited to the idea of a perſon who unites in himſelf two natures ſo different as the divine and the human.

While we neceſſarily admire this character, let us remember that it was drawn by perſons confeſſedly illiterate; by men of ordinary talents, who had never, it is probable, read any book but the Old Teſtament, and were perfectly ignorant of the art of compoſition. Whence, then, did they ſucceed ſo well in giving a deſcription

of an incarnate God; while, I will venture to aſſert, the moſt inventive and eloquent genius, if he had made the attempt, with no other aſſiſtance than what imagination ſupplied, would have miſſed the happy medium, and have elevated him too high, or depreſſed him too low? How did they ever think of ſuch a character at all, of which no model, nor even the fainteſt reſemblance, was found in the hiſtory of mankind? I know of only one anſwer to theſe queſtions, namely, that they actually ſaw ſuch a character; or that Jeſus Chriſt really appeared, and was ſuch a perſon as they repreſent him to have been. As the very uncommon portrait, which they have drawn, is certainly not a likeneſs of any individual who lived in a former age, and poſſeſſes ſuch features as convince us, that it could not be the work of fancy, we infer that they painted from the life *.

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* If it ſhould be ſaid, that they borrowed their ideas of his character from the Old Teſtament, it might be anſwered, that nothing is more improbable, than that their notions of the Meſſiah ſhould have been ſo different from thoſe of their countrymen, who read the ſame Scriptures; and after all, the queſtion would recur, From what ſource were the ideas of the writers of the Old Teſtament derived?

If, then, there was ſuch a perſon as Jeſus Chriſt, the only begotten Son of God in human nature, it may be confidently inferred, that his apoſtles were inſpired, not only becauſe he was able to give, but becauſe he expreſsly promiſed to give them the Holy Ghoſt. He who admits in general the account of our Saviour's life and character to be true, muſt, from a regard to conſiſtency, admit the whole of it, and by conſequence the promiſe of the miſſion of the Spirit made to his diſciples. Few, I believe, who allow the truth of the hiſtory, will diſpute this inference from it; and no reaſon can be aſſigned, why, if we give credit to the evangeliſts, in detailing the character of their Maſter, we ſhould call in queſtion their veracity, when they relate any of his ſayings. It would indeed be difficult, if not impoſſible, for any conſiderate man to perſuade himſelf, that, though the Son of God came into the world to declare the counſels of heaven, yet no perſon was qualified, in an extraordinary manner, to give a narrative of the moſt aſtoniſhing event in the annals of time; but that it was left to the uncertain choice, and unaſſiſted ability of ſome honeſt, but weak and unlearned men, to

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tranſmit an account of it to ſucceeding generations. It is ſtrange, that a thing ſo incredible ſhould be believed by thoſe pretended Chriſtians alone, who profeſs ſuch reverence for the authority of reaſon, that they will not believe even God himſelf, till his words have received the ſanction of its approbation.

Under this branch of the general argument for the inſpiration of the New Teſtament, founded on the *matter* contained in them, it may be proper to introduce a few obſervations on the *manner* in which ſome parts of it are written. The evangeliſts, in relating the hiſtory of Chriſt, have occaſion to ſpeak of the moſt aſtoniſhing facts; his miraculous conception; the wonders which he wrought in calming the fury of the winds and waves, raiſing the dead, caſting out devils, and curing all ſorts of diſeaſes; his transfiguration on the mount; the preternatural eclipſe of the ſun at his death, the rending of the rocks, and the opening of the graves; his reſurrection from the dead, and his aſcenſion to heaven. Might it not have been expected, that in recording ſuch events, they would have given vent to thoſe feelings of admiration, which they are ſo well

well calculated to awaken, and have deſcribed them with the moſt glowing expreſſions? Yet they are related in the moſt ſimple language, without any note of admiration, without any comment, without any attempt to ſet them off, or recommend them to the attention of the reader. This mode of writing did not proceed from inſenſibility, which in their circumſtances would have indicated a degree of callouſneſs, or torpor that could only have reſulted from abſolute ſtupidity. They inform us, that they were aſtoniſhed, when they ſaw the miracles of Jeſus; but they write of them, without any expreſſion of aſtoniſhment. How can their coolneſs be accounted for? Is it not a manifeſt proof, that in writing they were guided by a different ſpirit from their own; that they wrote not as they thought and felt themſelves, but as they were directed by another, who kept their thoughts and feelings under controul? The influence of the Holy Ghoſt is manifeſt in reſtraining them from mixing their own ſentiments and paſſions with the narrative, and in leading them to give a ſimple ſtatement of facts without any embelliſhment, that our faith in Chriſt might reſt entirely on the

evidences

evidences of his divine dignity and miſſion, and might not, in any degree, be owing to human wiſdom and eloquence.*.

It may be agreeable to the reader, and it will place the argument in a ſtill clearer light, to take notice of ſome other particulars.

Never did a perſon of ſuch virtue as Jeſus Chriſt appear in our world; never did virtue wear ſo amiable an aſpect; never was it calculated to make ſo intereſting an impreſſion on the heart. His character was at once perfect and attractive. His meekneſs and gentleneſs, his affability and condeſcenſion, his patience, his benevolence, his generous love diffuſed a ſoft and pleaſing luſtre over the ſeverer virtues, which were diſplayed in his conduct. An ancient philoſopher fondly imagined, that if virtue were incarnate, all men would be charmed with her beauty. We might at leaſt have expected, that thoſe who converſed with the Son of God, in whom, if I may be allowed the expreſſion, virtue was embodied, would have been raviſhed beyond meaſure with his excellencies, and would have celebrated them in the warmeſt ſtrains of commendation.

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* Weſt on the Reſurrection, 2 Edit. p. 355.

In their narrative, indeed, the lovely features of his character are exhibited to the greateſt advantage. But this is done by exhibiting them in their native ſimplicity without paint or decoration of any kind; and the writers, while they give a full detail of his virtues, paſs on without making a ſingle reflection.

Never did any perſon deſerve to meet with ſo good treatment as Jeſus Chriſt; and never was any ſo harſhly and cruelly uſed. His words were watched and miſconſtrued; his moſt beneficent deeds were, by the malignity of his countrymen, transformed into crimes; and evils of the blackeſt dye were laid to his charge. Was it not natural for diſciples, faithful and affectionate, to enter with ardour into the cauſe of their Maſter, and to repel with indignation, calumnies which they knew to originate in malice? Could we have been ſurpriſed, if their honeſt zeal had burſt forth into vehement exclamations againſt the injuſtice of his accuſers; and laying aſide the language of ceremony, which is indeed in moſt caſes the language of falſehood, had beſtowed on them, and their conduct, the names and epithets, which, we are ſure, they deſerved? Yet they leave their

Maſter

Maſter to vindicate himſelf; and even when he holds his peace, they truſt his apology to the ſilent and irreſiſtible eloquence of his conduct. They ſpeak of his enemies with as much coolneſs, as if they had done him no injury; and the dark ſhade of their actions is not deepened by a ſingle ſtroke of their pencil.

Never was there an event ſo aſtoniſhing as the death of Chriſt. The innocent have ſometimes fallen victims to the injuſtice of the world, or to their own generoſity. But who is this ſufferer? Is he not greater than all men? Is he not the Creator of the univerſe; and does not all nature, accordingly, pay him homage in his ſufferings? The moſt heroic love, therefore, is unworthy to be named along with the love of Jeſus. On this topic, the evangeliſts, full of admiration and gratitude, might have beſtowed all the colouring of imagery, and all the riches of language. It was a topic more calculated than any other to gratify their own feelings, and to intereſt ſtrangers in behalf of their Maſter. What tender and overpowering deſcriptions might they have given of his agonies! What melting, irreſiſtible appeals might they have made to the heart! While the

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ſcene was yet freſh in their remembrance, and their own hearts were ſtill bleeding with the wounds which his death had inflicted upon them, was it not natural to concentrate all their eloquence on a ſubject, which muſt have ſeemed to them alone worthy of attention? Yet though they record his death, and attribute it to his love, they neither give impaſſioned deſcriptions of the one, nor attempt to raiſe in our minds exalted ideas of the other. They leave to us the office of making ſuch reflections as the ſubject ſuggeſts.

This mode of writing indicates a very peculiar ſtate of mind. It would be abſurd to ſuppoſe that the writers had no feelings; and no motive can be aſſigned, why they ſhould have intentionally ſuppreſſed them. An impoſtor would have avoided this appearance of indifference, which might have given riſe to a ſuſpicion, that he did not himſelf believe his own narrative. For the abſence of all paſſion we can only account by admitting that their minds were controuled by ſupernatural influence. Their own emotions and affections were ſuſpended, that, during this interval of calm, the voice of the Divine Spirit might

alone be heard. Such a history as that of Christ could not have been written but by inspired men.

2. Let us next turn our attention to the system of doctrine exhibited in the New Testament. On examination, it will appear to be so excellent, that the persons who published it to the world, must have drawn it from a purer and more exalted source than either their own meditations or the writings of others.

The account of God and his perfections, which we find in the New Testament, commends itself to our reason, as worthy of the highest and most excellent of all beings. He is represented as a pure Spirit, possessed of wisdom, holiness, justice, and goodness, eternal, almighty, and unchangeable, the creator and governor of the world, the witness and judge of our actions. At the same time, his majesty is softened, if I may use this expression, by his benevolence, which is liberal and unwearied in diffusing good through the universe; which embraces the interests of our souls as well as of our bodies; and while it bestows in abundance the blessings and consolations of the present life, hath provided for us perfect and exalted

exalted felicity in a higher ſtage of exiſtence. Of all the views of God which had been ever given, none was ſo calculated to endear him to us, and to inſpire our hearts with confidence, as this ſhort but intereſting deſcription, of which the ſcheme of redemption affords a pleaſing illuſtration, "God is love." What men in all ages had in vain wiſhed for, an atonement for ſin, which conſcience and their natural notions of divine juſtice taught them to be neceſſary, the ſacred books point out in the death of Jeſus, whoſe blood, in conſequence of the dignity of his perſon, our reaſon perceives to have been of ſufficient value to expiate the guilt of innumerable millions. In favour of the immortality of the ſoul, a point ſo important, but which to the wiſeſt of the Gentiles ſeemed ſo doubtful, they ſpeak in the cleareſt and moſt deciſive language; and they hold up to the hopes and fears of mankind, rewards and puniſhments ſuited to their nature, and worthy of God to diſtribute. The ſyſtem of morality contained in them is pure and rational; alike remote from the over-ſtrained precepts of ſuperſtition and enthuſiaſm, and the looſe, compliant maxims of worldly policy. It comprehends all the

the duties which we owe to God and to man; it is calculated for every rank and order, and ſpeaks with equal ſtrictneſs and authority to the rich and honourable, and to the poor and ignoble; and the happy effect of it, if it were generally practiſed, would be to change the face of the world, and make it reſemble heaven.

Such are the outlines of the ſyſtem of doctrine taught in the books of the New Teſtament. From this ſlight ſketch, every perſon who has turned his attention to ſubjects of this nature, will be convinced, that no religion which was ever contrived by men, can come into competition with it. A compariſon between the ſentiments of the apoſtles, and the moſt eminent philoſophers of antiquity on the preceding articles, would turn out completely to the diſadvantage of the latter. Their beſt deſcriptions of God would be found blended with puerilities and errors; their diſquiſitions on the immortality of the ſoul, full of heſitation, uncertainty, and arguments which could ſatisfy no rational enquirer; their notions of the mode of propitiating the Deity, as diſtant from the truth as thoſe of the vulgar, with whoſe rites, frequently childiſh, and ſometimes abominable, they complied;

plied; their ſchemes of morality, deficient in their catalogues of virtues and vices, the one being in ſome inſtances put for the other, ſeparated from religion, the ſtock on which morality muſt be grafted, or it will never grow, and deſigned rather to furniſh a ſubject of ſpeculation, than to purify the heart, and regulate the practice. Who were the men that ſo far excelled them? Were they their ſuperiors in genius, ſcience, and learning? Had they read much, and reflected much; and was their ſyſtem the fruit of profound reſearch, and long meditation? No; one of them was a publican, ſeveral of them were fiſhermen, and, with the exception of Paul, who had ſome Jewiſh learning, which was of very little value, they were all rude and illiterate in the higheſt degree, and had ſcarcely thought on any ſubject but their daily occupations. From ſuch men we could not have expected a regular, connected ſyſtem of religion; and ſtill leſs could we have looked for a religion, which, in the ſublimity of its doctrines, and the purity of its precepts, ſhould tranſcend every other that had appeared in the world. Whence, then, had they this wiſdom, which is ſo conſpicuous in their writings? Muſt

it not have deſcended from the Father of lights, whoſe power is ſeen in perfecting praiſe out of the mouths of theſe babes and ſucklings? It is impoſſible to account for the doctrine of the New Teſtament, as coming from ſuch men, without admitting that they had received it by immediate revelation.

That the force of this argument may be fully perceived, I beg the attention of the reader to two particulars in their ſyſtem; their notions of the Meſſiah, and their views with reſpect to the Gentiles.

That the Jews were expecting a perſon whom they called the Meſſiah, is a hiſtorical fact, which will not be controverted. It is equally certain, that their ideas of his character were very different from thoſe which the ſacred writers have adopted. We learn from the New Teſtament, and more fully from the writings of the Jews, that they flattered themſelves with the hope of a temporal prince, who would command armies, ſubdue the nations of the world, and give the choſen people dominion and riches. That the diſciples of Chriſt originally entertained the ſame notions with their countrymen, is not only high-

ly

ly probable, but is rendered certain by their own acknowledgment. They thought that his kingdom would be a kingdom of this world, in which there would be places of emolument and dignity, to be enjoyed by the favourites of the prince *. To what cauſe, then, ſhall we attribute ſo complete a change in their ſentiments, that in their writings they ſpeak only of a ſpiritual Meſſiah, who would ſave his people, not by fighting, but by dying; and would ſave them, not from the power of the Romans, but from ſin, and death, and hell? The tranſition from carnal to ſpiritual ideas is ſlow and difficult; and is leaſt of all to be expected from perſons of uncultivated minds, whoſe conceptions are naturally groſs and corporeal. This mental revolution, therefore, is certainly very ſurpriſing; and no ſatisfactory account of it can be given, but that which is ſuggeſted by the following words: "Bleſſed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for fleſh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven †."

The

* Mat. xx. 21. Acts i. 6.

† Mat. xvi. 17.

The Jews looked down with diſdain upon the Gentiles, as a people whom God had forever abandoned; and they could not bear to think that thoſe accurſed idolaters, whom they deſpiſed and abhorred, ſhould ever ſtand on equal terms with them, in the favour of their Maker. This national prejudice, we may believe, like other national prejudices, was ſtrongeſt among the common people; and to this claſs, from which Paul and perhaps Luke were excepted by their education, all the other writers of the New Teſtament belonged. We learn from themſelves, that they were at firſt as reluctant, as any of their countrymen, to admit the Gentiles to a participation of the privileges of the goſpel *. Whence then did theſe men afterwards become zealous advocates for the Gentiles, publiſh to them the glad tidings of ſalvation, and receive them by baptiſm into the Chriſtian church; though by theſe proceedings they offended the prejudices, and provoked the reſentment of their unbelieving brethren? Whence did theſe ſelfiſh men become liberal? theſe bigots, philanthropiſts? Whence did fiſhermen and publicans form more exalted ideas of divine

* Acts x. xi. 1,---19.

divine love, and conceive a ſcheme of more extenſive benevolence, than the moſt enlightened doctors in Judea? The following words of an apoſtle furniſh an anſwer to theſe queſtions, and point out the only method of accounting for this ſingular fact in the hiſtory of the human mind. "Ye have heard of the diſpenſation of the grace of God, which is given me to youward; how that by revelation he made known to me the myſtery,—which in other ages was not made known unto the ſons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apoſtles and prophets by the Spirit; that the Gentiles ſhould be fellow-heirs, and of the ſame body, and partakers of his promiſe in Chriſt, by the goſpel *."

3. The

* Eph. iii. 2, 3. 5, 6. A compariſon of the apoſtles and the firſt Chriſtian writers would further illuſtrate and ſtrengthen the argument. Both treat of the ſame ſubjects, and the latter had the benefit of the writings of the former; but how ſtriking is the difference between the books of the New Teſtament, and the epiſtles of Clement and Ignatius, or any other work of the primitive fathers! In the epiſtle of Clement, there are many excellent advices againſt pride, and exhortations to unity, and other Chriſtian duties; and in the genuine epiſtles of Ignatius, with the exception of the interpolations, there are ſcriptural

3. The inſpiration of the New Teſtament may be inferred from the prophecies contained in them.

The argument from prophecy is plain and ſimple. We know the paſt by memory; the preſent by ſenſation and conſcioufneſs; and the future only by conjecture. From cauſes indeed which already exiſt and operate, we may infer the production of their uſual effects; and in ſome inſtances, the probability, that other men will act in a particular manner, may be ſo great as to juſtify

ſcriptural ſentiments and animated expreſſions of piety, particularly, I remember, in his epiſtle to the Romans: but how much do they fall ſhort of the apoſtolic writings, in the depth of the matter, the cloſeneſs of the reaſoning, the air of authority conjoined with ſimplicity, which we find in the latter? The reading of a few ſentences of each will demonſtrate the ſuperiority of thoſe which we call inſpired. And whence this ſuperiority could ariſe but from inſpiration, it is impoſſible to conceive. Thoſe fathers were not leſs, ſome of them were far more learned than the apoſtles; nor do they appear to have been at all inferior in natural talents. We are certain that Clement, and it is not improbable that Ignatius was their companion and diſciple; and beſides, as I have already obſerved, they had the apoſtolic writings as a model, whereas the apoſtles themſelves were originals. Phil. iv. 3.

tify us in taking very important ſteps in reference to their expected conduct. If we except, however, the concluſions founded on the laws of nature, which will operate in the ſame way a thouſand years hence as at preſent, our ideas of futurity are liable to be contradicted by facts, and for the moſt part are the combinations of fancy. Of events in particular, which ſhall take place many years or ages after our death, and which, in their contrivance and execution, ſhall depend on a thouſand cauſes unknown to us, and connected with the free agency of men, it is impoſſible to form any conception. They are known to Him alone, who beholds at a ſingle glance the paſt, the preſent, and the future. If any perſon then utter a prediction, which afterwards is punctually fulfilled, it is manifeſt that he muſt have acquired the knowledge of futurity from divine revelation. The conſequence is undeniable, that a book containing unequivocal prophecies ſhould be conſidered, not as a work of human ingenuity and foreſight, but as the word of that omniſcient Being, who declares the end from the beginning.

That there are predictions in the New Teſtament, which have been fulfilled, and are at preſent

ſent fulfilling in the world, nothing but groſs ignorance, or unbluſhing impudence, will prompt any perſon to deny. The prophecy of the deſtruction of Jeruſalem was delivered about forty years, and recorded about thirty, prior to that event; is expreſſed in the plaineſt language; and embraces a minute detail of particulars. How exactly it was accompliſhed we learn from Joſephus, the Jewiſh hiſtorian, who was not aware, when relating the ruin of his country, that he was employed by providence, to furniſh an illuſtrious proof of the truth of the goſpel, and of the divine character of Chriſt. Signs, portending the deſtruction of the devoted city, appeared in heaven above, and on the earth beneath; the armies of Rome drew near to beſiege it; their idolatrous ſtandards, fitly ſtyled "the abomination of deſolation," were diſplayed in the ſight of its inhabitants; the walls of the temple were thrown down, and not a ſingle ſtone was left upon another; and the ruins of Jeruſalem exhibited an awful monument of the divine vengeance, and with expreſſive ſilence admoniſhed the ſpectators to beware of unbelief and diſobedience. On this prediction, however, I ſhall not inſiſt, becauſe it may be ſuſpected

pected to have been written after the event; though this ſuſpicion be contradicted by the unanimous voice of all antiquity, aſſuring us, that the goſpels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, were publiſhed while Jeruſalem was ſtanding; and that only the goſpel of John, in which, it is remarkable, that the prediction is not inſerted, was written after its fall. I ſhall paſs over, likewiſe, the prophecies of Chriſt concerning his own death and reſurrection, the rejection of the Jews, and the calling of the Gentiles; and ſhall direct the attention of the reader to thoſe which reſpect the antichriſtian church, and its blaſphemous head.

In the writings of Paul and John it is foretold, that a certain power ſhould ariſe, which would aſſume the characters and attributes of divinity, change the laws and ordinances of heaven, work ſigns and lying wonders to confirm its uſurped authority and impious tenets, and perſecute, with unrelenting fury, thoſe who ſhould refuſe to ſubmit to its dominion. What is ſtill more remarkable, it is foretold that this power would profeſs the Chriſtian religion, for the man of ſin is repreſented as ſitting, not in a temple of idols, but in the temple of God; ſome of the doctrines and

practices which he would impose upon mankind are specified; and the very place where he would erect his throne is pointed out, the imperial city of Rome *. Let any person seriously consider this account, with all its particulars, and he will be convinced, that nothing was more improbable than the appearance of such a power, at the time when its rise was predicted. Who could have imagined, that any person, calling himself by the name of Christ, would dare to usurp his place, and style himself the head of his church; would carry his impiety and arrogance so far as to claim the titles of Lord and God, and the attributes of holiness and infallibility; would have the audacity to interpose his mandates in cases already decided by the supreme authority of heaven; to prohibit what God had permitted and commanded, and to enjoin what he had forbidden? Who could have supposed, that Christians, in the days of the apostles so enlightened, and so jealous of their spiritual liberties, would ever become so stupid and indifferent, as to allow such a power to raise itself on the ruins of their religion and their reason; and to exercise an imperious sway over

* 2 Thess. ii. 1,—12. 1 Tim. iv. 1,—3. Rev. xvii. &c.

over their bodies and their conſciences? Could fancy, in its wildeſt workings, have conceived, that Rome, the miſtreſs of the world, the city where the Ceſars reigned, and idolatry triumphed in the plenitude of power and ſplendour; that Rome, where Chriſtianity was little known, and was known only to be hated and proſcribed, would at ſome future period acknowledge as its ſovereign a Chriſtian prieſt? Nothing could have been more remote from the apprehenſions of men; and if ſuch an event, or combination of events, had by ſome chance been ſuggeſted, it would have been deemed equally abſurd as the moſt extravagant dream of a madman. Yet theſe improbable predictions have been moſt punctually fulfilled in all their circumſtances, as Proteſtant writers have unanſwerably proved.

There is one book of the New Teſtament, which almoſt wholly conſiſts of predictions, and ought to be conſidered as ſuſtaining a very peculiar character. It is a hiſtory, written before hand, of the church, and of the grand political events connected with her fate, from the age of the writer to the end of the world. To conſider the ſcheme of prophecy laid down in the Revelation,

tion, would lead to a diſcuſſion too tedious for this place. It may ſuffice to obſerve, that of its predictions many have been already fulfilled, as we have ſeen with reſpect to ſome of thoſe which relate to the antichriſtian church, others are at preſent fulfilling; and hence we are authoriſed to expect, that the reſt will be fulfilled in their order and ſeaſon.

From this ſlight ſurvey of the prophetical parts of the New Teſtament, the inſpiration of the writers may be fairly deduced. If there be a deciſive proof that a man ſpoke, not by his own ſpirit, but by the Spirit of God, it is this, that he declared things, which it was not poſſible for any creature placed in the ſame circumſtances to have known by natural means. His knowledge in ſuch a caſe is manifeſtly ſupernatural. He who foretold with the utmoſt preciſion events which did not take place for ſome hundred years after his death, muſt have had intercourſe with that Being, from whoſe eye nothing is hidden, and whoſe infinite mind comprehends the whole chain of cauſes and effects.

Some obſervations on the argument from prophecy will be introduced in the next chapter, when

when we conſider the inſpiration of the Old Teſtament.

The preceding illuſtration, I truſt, will make the reader ſenſible of the ſtrength of this third argument for the divine authority of the Chriſtian Scriptures. Conjoined with the two former arguments, it completes the proof which I propoſed to bring; and I am perſuaded, that in the mind of every perſon, who underſtands and ſeriouſly ponders it, the evidence now produced will give riſe to a full conviction, that the books of the New Teſtament are not the compoſitions of men who meant to impoſe upon the world, but a genuine revelation from heaven, in recording which the writers were infallibly guided by the Spirit of truth.

CHAP. V.

THE INSPIRATION OF THE OLD TESTAMENT.

When the Son of God expired without the gates of Jeruſalem, the end was accompliſhed, for which the Jews had been ſeparated from the other nations, and the law of Moſes had been given. Their ritual, therefore, loſt all its force; and the obſervance of it was rendered impracticable, by the deſtruction of their temple, and their diſperſion over the face of the earth. But the Jewiſh Scriptures did not become uſeleſs, and their authority was not abrogated, when the nation, of which they contain the hiſtory and the laws, ceaſed to exiſt in its political and eccleſiaſtical capacity. We ſtill revere them as authentic records of thoſe diſpenſations which were introductory to the goſpel; and we receive them as

a part of the rule of faith and manners, the obligation of which is perpetual.

It must be acknowledged, indeed, that the Scriptures of the New Testament are more adapted to our circumstances, than those of the Old in general are; and that the former excel the latter in several respects. Every work of God is good; but as he is a wise and free agent, he does not always work to the utmost of his power. One work, therefore, may be comparatively better than another, though he who is infinite in perfection be the author of both; and consequently one portion of revelation may surpass another in the importance of its matter, the clearness of its doctrines, and the rich and animating displays of divine grace which it affords. The gospel may excel the law, as the law was more glorious than the patriarchal dispensation. Yet ascribing, as we do, the same original to the law and to the gospel, to the writings of the prophets and to those of the apostles, we assign to both an equal rank in the sacred canon; and we seek from both instruction with respect to the conduct of life and the salvation of our souls. I know of none, by whom the inspiration of the Old Testament

hath

hath been denied, while that of the New was admitted, except ſome ancient heretics, who ſeem indeed to have been delirious fanatics; and who affirmed, that the God of the Jews was an evil being, and that Moſes and the prophets were his miniſters *.

In entering on the proof of the inſpiration of the ſacred books, I obſerved, that though their natural order required us to begin with thoſe of the Old Teſtament, yet a conſiderable advantage would be afterwards found to reſult from firſt aſcertaining the inſpiration of the Chriſtian Scriptures. The advantage is this, that, if the New Teſtament be once proved to be inſpired, the inſpiration of the Old Teſtament muſt be admitted without farther proof, becauſe its books are explicitly recognized in the former as divine. Nothing more, then, can now be reaſonably demanded of us than to ſhow, that the New Teſtament,

* Of theſe the moſt noted were the Manicheans, ſo called from Manes, or Manichæus the founder of the ſect. It appears that they likewiſe rejected ſome books of the New Teſtament. Moſheim's Hiſt. Cent. iii. Chap. 5. Similar notions were vented by other heretical ſects.

ment, of the inſpiration of which we are already convinced, gives its ſanction to the Old.

I may begin with obſerving, that the New Teſtament is founded on the Old, proceeds on the ſuppoſition of its divinity, and profeſſes to be an accompliſhment of the plan laid down in its prophecies and typical inſtitutions. "Moſes truly ſaid unto the fathers, A Prophet ſhall the Lord your God raiſe up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him ſhall ye hear in all things whatſoever he ſhall ſay unto you. Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel, and thoſe that follow after, as many as have ſpoken, have likewiſe foretold of theſe days *." It might be remarked, that when we ſee an extenſive and complex plan executed, at the diſtance of many ages, even in its minuteſt parts, by the agency of perſons, too, many of whom were totally unacquainted with it, while nothing was farther from the intention of the reſt than to contribute to its accompliſhment, we muſt pronounce the book, in which it is detailed, to have been dictated by the Spirit of prophecy. But another opportunity will occur of introducing and illuſtrating this argument.

Our

* Acts iii. 22. 24.

Our reaſoning from the New Teſtament is not confined to the general argument drawn from its connection with the Old, but is founded on a variety of paſſages, in which the inſpiration of the Jewiſh ſcriptures is acknowledged. Among the privileges of the Jews, it is mentioned by Paul as the chief, that to them were committed "the oracles of God*." By theſe oracles are undeniably meant, writings containing the revelations which God had made of his will to their fathers; and that theſe writings were the ſame which were in common uſe among the Jews in his time, is evident from the references to them, in other parts of his epiſtles. In the ſecond epiſtle to Timothy, he gives an expreſs atteſtation to their divinity. "All ſcripture is given by inſpiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for inſtruction in righteouſneſs†." But the ſcriptures, which he declares to be inſpired, are chiefly, if not ſolely, the Jewiſh: for they are the ſame which Timothy had known from his childhood; and, in the early part of his life, no part of the New Teſtament was written. When our Saviour ſays to the Jews, "Search the ſcriptures,"

* Rom. iii. 2. † 2 Tim. iii. 16.

ſcriptures," or, as the word would be more properly rendered, "Ye ſearch the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they that teſtify of me *:" he means, by the ſcriptures, thoſe writings which were held ſacred among them; and he is ſo far from blaming them for believing their inſpiration, that he juſtifies their eſteem and reſpect for them, by ſubjoining, that they teſtified of him. The Jews, as we have already obſerved, divided their ſcriptures into the Law, the Prophets, and the Holy writings. This arrangement was, in ſome reſpects, extremely inaccurate; but under theſe three claſſes all the books of the Old Teſtament were comprehended. The following words, which have been already mentioned as a proof, that we poſſeſs the ſame books which in the days of Chriſt were received by the Jews, may be again brought forward to ſhow, that they come to us under the ſanction of his approbation. "Theſe are the words which I ſpake unto you while I was yet with you, that all things muſt be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moſes, and in the prophets, and in the pſalms concerning me †." The greater part of the

* John v. 39. † Luke xxiv. 44.

the books of the Old Teſtament are quoted in the New; and the quotations are often introduced under the title of "the ſcripture," the writing, by way of eminence, that is the inſpired writing, as is plain from the paſſage in the ſecond epiſtle to Timothy mentioned above; and they are always repreſented as of equal authority with the ſayings of the Apoſtles. "The ſcriptures, foreſeeing that God would juſtify the heathen through faith, preached before the goſpel to Abraham, ſaying, In thy ſeed ſhall all nations be bleſſed." "But the ſcripture hath concluded all under ſin, that the promiſe by faith of Jeſus Chriſt might be given to them that believe." "What ſaith the ſcripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteouſneſs." "The ſcripture ſaith, Whoſoever believeth on him ſhall not be aſhamed." "Whatſoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning; that we, through patience and comfort of the ſcriptures, might have hope *." To enumerate all the inſtances of the ſame kind would be endleſs, and is perfectly unneceſſary. I ſhall only add on this point, that neither Chriſt nor his apoſtles

* Gal. iii. 8, 22. Rom. iv 3. x. 11. xv. 4.

ever charged the Jews with having loſt or ſuppreſſed any part of the Scriptures; with having inſerted any human compoſition into the ſacred canon; or with having adulterated the inſpired writings with a mixture of their own opinions; ſo that we are certain that the ancient revelation hath been tranſmitted to us pure and entire.

The concluſion from theſe premiſes is obvious, and incontrovertible. If the books of the Old Teſtament be declared in the New to be inſpired, the neceſſity of any farther proof of their inſpiration is ſuperſeded. We are authoriſed, by the arguments in the two preceding chapters, to aſſert, that the apoſtles and evangeliſts wrote under the impulſe, and by the aſſiſtance of the Holy Ghoſt. When they ſay, therefore, that the Old Teſtament is inſpired, their teſtimony has equal authority, and claims equal credit, as when they publiſh any of the doctrines, and inculcate any of the duties of the Chriſtian religion. It was not more poſſible that they ſhould err in the one caſe than in the other. In truth, their teſtimony ought to be conſidered as the teſtimony of the ſame Spirit, by whom the writers of the Old Teſtament were aſſiſted. It is the Holy Ghoſt

ſpeaking

ſpeaking by them, who affirms, that the Jewiſh Scriptures are not the productions of either pious or impious men; but were framed under his immediate direction, and by the aid of his inſpiration. They could not, therefore, without manifeſt inconſiſtency, be rejected by any perſon who is previouſly convinced of the divine authority of the New Teſtament. Indeed, if we be fully perſuaded of the inſpiration of the latter, as we cannot reaſonably doubt, ſo we will feel no inclination to doubt the inſpiration of the former.

Here, then, we might cloſe our proof, and proceed to the next branch of the ſubject. That I may not ſeem, however, to paſs too ſlightly over a matter ſo important, and that nothing may be omitted through haſte, by which the faith of the reader might be eſtabliſhed, I ſhall, in the following part of the chapter, give a conciſe view of the arguments, which ſeem to prove, independently of the authority of the New Teſtament, that the books of the Old are inſpired. In order to bring forward diſtinctly the different ſpecies of arguments which are applicable to different books, I ſhall divide them into three claſſes; the Books of Moſes, the Hiſtorical Books, and the Prophetical.

Under

Under theſe diviſions they will all be comprehended, except a few, concerning which I ſhall ſubjoin ſome ſeparate remarks.

I. I begin with the Books of Moſes, which are firſt in order.

In proving their divinity, I ſhall purſue a train of reaſoning ſimilar to that employed in the ſecond argument for the inſpiration of the New Teſtament. I beg leave, then, to lay down and illuſtrate the two following propoſitions, of which the ſecond is a native and incontrovertible inference from the firſt. Moſes was the writer of thoſe books which are univerſally aſcribed to him. If he wrote thoſe books, they are inſpired.

The firſt of theſe propoſitions is not only highly probable, from the ſpirit of ancient ſimplicity which breathes in the books, and renders it very unlikely, that they were fabricated in a later age; but it is as certain as any thing of this nature can be, from the unanimous teſtimony of the Jews. If we believe any other nation, with reſpect to the antiquity, and authors of its laws, no reaſon can be aſſigned, why we ſhould not

give

give credit to them. Their teſtimony is as good as that of the Athenians concerning Solon, of the Romans concerning Numa Pompilius, and of the Perſians concerning Zoroaſter; or rather, from circumſtances which will be afterwards explained, and which led them to inveſtigate this point with the utmoſt diligence and accuracy, they are better entitled to belief than any other people under heaven. But the Jews are not the only witneſſes of this important fact. Moſes was celebrated as a legiſlator among the Gentiles; and his writings, in which the laws are recorded which he delivered to the Iſraelites, are occaſionally mentioned by them *. To deny, therefore, that Moſes was the author of the Pentateuch would ſet aſide human teſtimony as a foundation of belief, and overthrow our faith in all ancient hiſtory; for there are few facts ſo fully atteſted.

In corroboration of this argument, founded on the united teſtimony of all paſt ages, it may be obſerved, that if Moſes was not the writer of thoſe books, but they were forged at a later pe-

* Vid. Grot. de Verit. Relig. Chriſt. Lib. I. cap. 16. Juſt. Martyr. Cohort. ad Græcos.

riod, as infidels insinuate, it was impossible that they could have been received, or by any art have been imposed upon the Israelites. If the writings be supposititious, they must have appeared in the next age, or several ages after the death of Moses. Had the impostor published them soon after his death, the history of that lawgiver, and his transactions, was too fresh in the memories of the Israelites, to allow his fabricated account to gain any credit. The cheat would have been detected, and exposed by those who had lived with Moses, or by their children, who had heard a faithful narrative of his laws, and his conduct from their fathers. Had he written at a later period, it would have been impossible to persuade the people, the men of knowledge and station, as well as the multitude, that such a system of laws as the Pentateuch enjoins had been delivered by Moses to their progenitors; and to prevail upon them to make it from that time forward the basis of their civil and religious polity. They would have said to the impostor, What documents can you produce to authenticate these writings? How hath it happened, that if these laws were, as you pretend, promulgated to our fathers,

and

and the obſervance of them be the condition, on which we poſſeſs the land which we inhabit, the memory of them hath been ſo completely loſt, that not one but yourſelf ever heard of them before? We muſt ſuppoſe the Iſraelites to have been leſs than men, to have been children in underſtanding, and ſimpletons of the loweſt order, if we think that the moſt artful knave could have impoſed upon them ſuch a code of laws as that which bears the name of Moſes, as the genuine work of that ancient legiſlator. No man would now be able to perſuade us, that a code of laws which he had drawn up in his cloſet, was enacted by our anceſtors ſeveral ages ago; and ſtill leſs could he perſuade us, to repeal all our preſent laws, and eſtabliſh that new code in their room. But, if the books of Moſes were not written by himſelf, all this muſt have been done by ſome unknown perſon in the land of Judea *.

If

* It has been urged, as a proof that the books of Moſes are not genuine, that ſome things are found in them, which have been evidently written in a later age. It is Voltaire, I believe, who endeavours to make his readers merry at the idea of Moſes having left on record an account of his own death. Deut. xxxiv.

It

If Moſes was the author of thoſe books, which are univerſally aſcribed to him, it follows, that they are inſpired. That the propriety of this inference

It hath been remarked, likewiſe, that ſome places are called by names, which we certainly know to have been given them, long after we aſſert that the Pentateuch was written. We read, that Abraham purſued the kings whom he had routed "unto Dan," Gen. xiv. 14. whereas we learn elſewhere, that its original name Laiſh, was not exchanged for Dan, till the children of Dan conquered it in the days of the Judges, Judg. xviii. 29. In Gen. xxxvii. 14. and in ſome other places, mention is made of Hebron; but it appears from Joſh. xiv. 14, 15. that its name was Kirjath-arba, before Caleb received it from Joſhua as his inheritance. If, however, we ſhould ſay, that ſome perſon added to the books of Moſes an account of his death; and that the ſame perſon, or ſome other, in the room of ancient names which were forgotten, put the modern names, that the places might be known, we would make a conceſſion, which would not at all affect the genuineneſs of the book; the objection would be repelled in the eaſieſt and ſimpleſt manner; and the poor triumph of infidelity would ceaſe. "A ſmall addition to a book," ſays an eminent writer, and I may add, the occaſional change of a name, "does not deſtroy either the genuineneſs or the authenticity of the whole book." A few other inſtances are either explained in the ſame manner, or it is ſhewn, that there was nothing in the age and circumſtances of Moſes to hinder him from being the writer of ſuch paſſages. Vid. Witſ. de Prophetis et Prophetia, cap. xiv. Biſhop Watſon's Apology for the Bible, Letter iii.

inference may be made evident, it will be neceſſary to take a view of the laws which they contain. The firſt thought which ariſes on a ſuperficial ſurvey of them is, that they were exceedingly burdenſome; or a yoke, as the apoſtle Peter calls them, which neither the men of his age, nor their fathers, were able to bear *. Some of the ſervices which they enjoined were very coſtly, as the ſacrifices, and the payment of tithes; and ſome of them were very troubleſome, as the precautions neceſſary to avoid pollution, and the various purifications. The rites preſcribed by them were contrary to thoſe held ſacred by all other nations; and could not fail, therefore, to render the Jews odious in the eyes of their neighbours †. Inſtead of permitting an intercommunity

* Acts xv. 10.

† "Moſes, quo ſibi in poſterum gentem firmaret," I quote the words of Tacitus, "novos ritus, contrarioſque ceteris mortalibus indidit. Profana illic omnia, quæ apud nos ſacra: rurſum conceſſa apud illos, quæ nobis inceſta." Hiſt. Lib. v. 4. Some writers have maintained, that many of the Egyptian rites, corrected, they acknowledge, and improved, were adopted into the Jewiſh ceremonial; and in this part of his conduct, they ſay, God gave a diſplay of his wiſdom, as the minds of ſo rude a people as the Iſraelites

nity of worſhip, they taught the Iſraelite to regard every foreign rite with abhorrence; and pronounced the ſervice of a ſtrange god to be a crime

Iſraelites could not have been reconciled to a new ſyſtem of worſhip, if ſome parts of the old one had not been retained. But this opinion proceeds on a ſuppoſition highly improbable, and which being totally incapable of proof we are at liberty to deny, that the rites of the Egyptians in the days of Moſes were the ſame as they were found to be, about a thouſand years after, by the Greeks, from whoſe writings we have acquired ſome knowledge of their religious obſervances. But this is not the only objection. The reſemblance between the Egyptian and the Jewiſh rites at this late period, when there is certainly as much reaſon to ſuſpect that the Egyptians had borrowed from the Jews, as that the Jews had borrowed from the Egyptians, if there was any borrowing in the caſe; the reſemblance, I ſay, between the rites of the two nations is by no means ſo great as ſome writers, in their eagerneſs to eſtabliſh a favourite hypotheſis, repreſent it. Every man has his own conceptions of what it is right and becoming for God to do; but to me it appears derogatory to his honour to maintain, that he admitted into his own worſhip, the abominable uſages of idolaters. The beſt method, I ſhould think, to preſerve a people from idolatry, is not to allow them to retain ſome of its ceremonies, which would perpetually tempt them to return to it; but to confine them to a ritual entirely new. I ſhall only add, that few Chriſtians will be able to prevail on themſelves to believe, that rites which had been uſed in the ſervice of idols, or as the Scripture calls them, devils, and which God, therefore, had

beheld

crime punishable with death. Nay, the laws of Moſes enjoined certain duties, which no legiſlator but himſelf ever thought of enacting, becauſe, without the miraculous interpoſition of Providence to prevent the calamities which they were calculated to produce, they were fraught with certain ruin to the ſtate. Thrice every year, all the males were commanded to repair to Jeruſalem, and conſequently, ſo often the country was to be left open to the incurſions of its enemies; once in every ſeven years, and two years together at the jubilee, they were ordered to let their fields lie fallow, or in other words, at theſe ſtated intervals, to expoſe themſelves to the miſeries of famine; and they were forbidden to multiply horſes, or to make uſe of cavalry in their wars, from the want of which they muſt have fought on unequal terms with the nations around them *.

Here

beheld with abhorrence, were afterwards transformed into types of Chriſt, and the ſublime myſteries of redemption. The learned reader, who would ſee this ſubject fully diſcuſſed, may conſult Witſii Egyptiaca.

* Exod xxiii. 17. 10, 11. Lev. xxv. 1,---12. 20,---22. Deut. xvii. 16. Joſh. xi. 6.

Here then, I may ask, Whether it was at all probable, that Moſes would prevail upon his countrymen to ſubmit to ſuch a ſyſtem of laws? Would a people ſo ſelf-willed and refractory, as from their hiſtory we know them to have been, allow a yoke ſo heavy to be wreathed about their necks? Or would a people attentive to their own intereſts, and endowed with common prudence, aſſent to a law which ſeemed to have been expreſsly framed for the purpoſe of involving them in temporal ruin? Yet it is certain, that the Iſraelites did receive that law, and obſerve it, during many ages, while they ſubſiſted as a political body; and that they ſtill entertain the higheſt veneration for it, and yield obedience to ſuch of its precepts as are practicable in their preſent circumſtances. This is ſurely a very aſtoniſhing fact. A people of the moſt ſtubborn diſpoſitions ſubmit to a moſt troubleſome law; to a law, which it ſeemed madneſs to obey. To endeavour to account for this fact, by ſuppoſing ſome artifice to have been employed by Moſes to deceive them into a compliance with his meaſures, is by no means ſatisfactory. Their ſituation was not favourable to any trick or deception. Had they

they been separated into small companies, and scattered over the face of a large country, they might have become an easy prey to some cunning men in the interest of Moses, who might have succeeded in deluding them one after another; but they were united in one body in the wilderness, and were too unwieldy a mass to be moulded by the hand of an impostor. It is impossible to account for the reception of his law on any other principle, than that he satisfied the people with regard to his authority to enact it. But no authority less than divine could have sufficed to sanction such a law; no other authority could have controuled and silenced the many interests and passions which rose in opposition to it. The reception of his law, therefore, may be considered as a proof, that the Hraelites witnessed such works done by him, as convinced them, that he was the minister and messenger of Jehovah, the God of their nation. He who will dispute this reasoning, must oppose it, not by impertinent cavils, of the futility of which he is himself probably sensible; but by shewing how Moses could have succeeded, without a divine commission, in

making so vexatious and dangerous a law be embraced by so perverse a people.

Agreeably to these observations, we find him in the law appealing to miracles which are said to have been wrought before their eyes. This appeal is a proof, that they were actually wrought; for Moses would not have risked his credit and influence among his countrymen, by boasting of attestations from heaven, which, it must have been known by all who heard him, or read his writings, were never given. He would not have dared to affirm, that Egypt was smitten with terrible plagues, if none had been inflicted upon it; that the Red Sea was divided before them, if they had not passed through the midst of its waves; that manna fell from heaven around their tents, if they had never eaten that heavenly food; or that God spake to them out of the midst of the fire, if they had not heard his voice publishing the decalogue from Sinai. These events, if they really took place, were exposed to the senses of all the people; and no man, who had not witnessed them, could have been persuaded that he had. If, however, it be conceived possible for one man to be reasoned or cheated out of his

his senses, we may, without hesitation, deny the possibility of such a deception in the case of six hundred thousand.

If the miracles, to which Moses appeals, were actually wrought, he was declared to be a prophet, and his law to be a revelation from God; for, as we have seen in the case of the apostles, the miracles were the seal of heaven set to his commission. Hence we infer, that his writings, in which the law is contained, were inspired, because the same supernatural assistance, which he enjoyed in delivering it to the congregation, we may be certain, was vouchsafed to him in recording it for the benefit of succeeding generations. It is unnecessary to repeat the reasoning under the first argument for the inspiration of the New Testament, which might be employed, in this perfectly similar case, without any alteration. But it being once admitted that he wrote his law by inspiration, we can feel no difficulty in believing, that he was under the same infallible direction in the other parts of his writings. We may be confident that he, whom God hath empowered to make a revelation to mankind, will not be permitted to mingle his own stories and opinions with

with it. All thoſe things, therefore, which are inſerted in the ſame volume with the law, as the hiſtory of the creation, and of the world from the firſt ages to the deliverance from Egypt, are equally authentic as the law itſelf, and the account of the miraculous tranſactions in the wilderneſs. It would be highly unreaſonable to limit the proof of inſpiration from his miracles to one part, or to ſome parts of his writings. In ſtrict language, the miracles atteſted his character, or pointed him out as a divine meſſenger; and from ſuch a perſon we are bound to receive as equally true and authoritative, every thing which he delivers in the name of God, whether law, hiſtory, doctrine, or prediction.

I have been the longer in proving the inſpiration of the five books of Moſes, becauſe they are the fundamental part of the Jewiſh Scriptures; and a firm belief of their divinity will prepare us for the reception of thoſe other books, which we propoſed in the next place to conſider.

II. Let us now direct our attention to the Hiſtorical Books.

It is not my deſign, under this diviſion, to diſcuſs,

cuſs ſeparately the proofs of the inſpiration of each particular book; nor perhaps is it neceſſary, that I ſhould attempt to prove their inſpiration at all, becauſe, ſince the days of the Samaritans, few, who admitted the divinity of the five books of Moſes, have refuſed to acknowledge the authority of the remaining parts of the Old Teſtament. There is no ſatisfactory evidence in ſupport of the vulgar notion, that the hiſtorical books were rejected, along with the prophetical, by the Sadducees. Joſephus brings no ſuch charge againſt them; but on the contrary he ſays, that, though they diſregarded the traditions of the elders, they received τὰ γεγραμμένα, the written books. They are not accuſed of this crime by the Rabbies, nor is it likely that ſo great an offence would have been tolerated by their zealous countrymen; and they are repreſented by the Talmudiſts as reaſoning from the other books, as well as from the law. Indeed the inſpiration of the Pentateuch being ſuppoſed, that of the hiſtorical books ſeems naturally and almoſt unavoidably to follow. And it is no inconſiderable argument for their inſpiration, that they are neceſſary to exhibit a complete view of that plan of providence reſpecting the

Jews, of which the giving of the law conſtituted, I may ſay, the firſt ſtep. The following obſervations will illuſtrate this idea.

On the ſuppoſition that the books of Moſes were inſpired, and that the law contained in them is divine, it might have been expected, that we ſhould be furniſhed with a narrative of the ſettlement of the Iſraelites in the land of Canaan, which their Lawgiver had promiſed them, in the name of God, as their inheritance, and in which alone his law could in all its parts be obſerved. A hiſtory, too, of the divine diſpenſations towards them ſubſequent to that event, might have been looked for, to ſhew, that, in their national capacity, they were treated according to the ſanctions of their law; and that, as they proſpered by obedience, ſo they were viſited for their crimes with temporal calamities. In conſequence of the change of the form of government, which was adminiſtered for a long period by judges, but afterwards became regal, an account was wanted of the cauſes which gave riſe to this revolution; and in particular, of the elevation of the family of David to the throne, from which the Meſſiah was to ſpring. As of the twelve tribes, which originally compoſed

poſed the nation of Iſrael, ten having revolted from Rehoboam the grandſon of David, and forſaken the worſhip of God at Jeruſalem, were, after ſome time, led away captive into a land from which they never returned, a ſhort hiſtory of theſe tribes ſeems neceſſary to acquaint us with the reaſons why God rejected ſo large a portion of a people whom he had choſen as his own inheritance. The hiſtory of the tribe of Judah was peculiarly worthy to be recorded, becauſe the Meſſiah was to come from that tribe; and in conſequence of the apoſtacy of the reſt, all the privileges of the church became its excluſive poſſeſſion, and in it alone the true worſhip of God was preſerved. A detail of its backſlidings was requiſite to account for its captivity in Babylon; and without a relation of its return, at the appointed time, to its own land, the faithfulneſs of God, in fulfilling the word ſpoken by his ſervants the prophets, would not have appeared.

Theſe are the parts of the Jewiſh hiſtory, concerning which it ſeems proper that we ſhould be informed. Now, ſuch a hiſtory as I have ſuppoſed we find in the books of Joſhua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah; and

and the inſpiration of theſe books is the more probable, becauſe they contain the very things of which it was natural to expect an account, if the law of Moſes proceeded from God himſelf, and the Iſraelites were under his peculiar care. To me it appears to be contrary to all reaſon to imagine, that though we have been favoured with an inſpired relation of the firſt tranſactions of God with that people, we ſhould have only a human and uncertain hiſtory of his ſubſequent tranſactions, to which the firſt were only introductory.

In the books which I have mentioned, we meet with many miracles; but theſe, inſtead of rendering the hiſtory ſuſpected, are, in my opinion, evidences of its authenticity. In the books of Moſes, which we have proved to be inſpired, the Iſraelites are repreſented as under a miraculous providence. It is, therefore, as reaſonable to look for miracles in their hiſtory, as not to look for them in the hiſtory of any ordinary people; and if nothing of that nature had occurred in their hiſtorical books, we would have been juſtified in calling in queſtion the truth of the narrative. The hiſtory of a nation under a miraculous providence, in which no ſupernatural interpoſitions are mentioned,

tioned, but all things proceed in the uſual train, would be as manifeſtly falſe, as the hiſtory of a warlike people, which deſcribed them as uniformly cultivating the arts of peace. Now it is not probable that God would leave a miraculous hiſtory to be written in the ſame manner as a common hiſtory, namely, by men who had no particular call, and were qualified by no extraordinary aſſiſtance. It is more agreeable to our notions of his wiſdom to believe, that he would expreſsly raiſe up choſen perſons to give a faithful, and authoritative record of ſuch ſingular tranſactions. The omiſſions and miſrepreſentations, of which uninſpired writers might have been guilty, through want of information, inadvertence, or deſign, would have defeated the intention of recording them. God would have been robbed of his glory, and we would have been deprived of the inſtruction and conſolation which we might have drawn from the unuſual diſplays of his power and goodneſs.

The perſons by whom the hiſtorical books were written, are not now certainly known; but they are commonly believed to have been compoſed by men of a prophetical ſpirit, as Joſhua, Samuel,

Samuel, Nathan, Gad, and other ſeers, Ezra, and Nehemiah. To theſe, as the writers of them, they have been aſcribed by both Jews and Chriſtians; and there are ſome paſſages in the books themſelves, which appear to favour their opinion. If Joſhua wrote the words of the covenant which he made with the people, it is not improbable, that he wrote likewiſe the other tranſactions in the book which bears his name *. Mention is made of books diſtinguiſhed by the names of Samuel, Gad, Nathan, Ahijah, Iddo, Shemaiah. "Now the acts of David the king, firſt and laſt, behold they are written in the book of Samuel the ſeer, and in the book of Nathan the prophet, and in the book of Gad the ſeer." "Now the reſt of the acts of Solomon, firſt and laſt, are they not written in the book of Nathan the prophet, and in the prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite, and in the viſions of Iddo the ſeer, againſt Jeroboam the ſon of Nebat?" "Now the acts of Rehoboam, firſt and laſt, are they not written in the book of Shemaiah the prophet, and of Iddo the ſeer concerning genealogies †?" From theſe paſſages

* Joſh. xxiv. 26.

† 1 Chron. xxix. 29. 2 Chron. ix. 29. xii. 15.

ſages we learn, that ſeveral perſons, ſtyled prophets and ſeers, becauſe they were favoured with ſupernatural knowledge, committed to writing the tranſactions of their times; whence we may, with much appearance of reaſon, infer, that they were the compilers of ſome of thoſe hiſtorical books to which a place hath been aſſigned in the canon. By them the books of Samuel and Kings were probably written; and perhaps theſe are the very books to which reference is made, with ſome difference of the names, in the foregoing paſſages. The Chronicles have been aſcribed to Iſaiah, and to Jeremiah, but more generally to Ezra, who, it is allowed by all, wrote the book which goes under his name. The ſame thing is granted with reſpect to Nehemiah.

If, however, we cannot determine with certainty the authors of the Hiſtorical Books, we may reſt aſſured, that the Jews, who had already received inſpired books from the hands of Moſes, would not have admitted any other as coming from the ſame original, if they had not ſeen inconteſtible evidence, that the writers were ſupernaturally aſſiſted. Next to the teſtimony of Chriſt and his apoſtles, which corroborates all our reaſonings

ſonings for the inſpiration of the Old Teſtament, and, when diſtinct arguments for any particular book cannot be found, ſupplies their place, we muſt depend, in the caſe before us, on the teſtimony of the Jews. And though the teſtimony of a nation be far from being, in every inſtance, a ſufficient reaſon, why we ſhould allow its ſacred books to be poſſeſſed of that divine authority which they arrogate; yet the teſtimony of the Jews has a peculiar title to credit from the circumſtances in which it was delivered. It is the teſtimony of a people, who having already in their poſſeſſion genuine inſpired books, were the better able to judge of others which advanced a claim to inſpiration; and who, we have reaſon to think, far from being credulous with reſpect to ſuch a claim, or diſpoſed precipitately to recognize it, proceeded with deliberation and care, in examining all pretenſions of this nature, and rejected them if not ſupported by ſatisfactory evidence. They had been forewarned that falſe prophets ſhould ariſe, and deliver their own fancies in the name of the Lord; and while they were thus put upon their guard, they were furniſhed with rules to aſſiſt them in diſtinguiſhing a true from a pretended

tended revelation *. We have a proof that the ancient Jews exercised a spirit of discrimination in this matter, though at a period later than that to which we refer, in their conduct with respect to the apocryphal books: for though these books were written by men of their own nation, and bore the names of the most eminent personages, Solomon, Daniel, Ezra, and Baruch, they rejected them as human compositions, and left the *infallible* church to mistake them for divine. As the Jews then have, without a dissenting voice, asserted the inspiration of their historical books, their testimony, strengthened by their peculiar circumstances, authorises us to receive them as a part of those Scriptures which were intended for our learning, that we, through the patience and comfort which by the divine blessing they impart, might have hope.

III. I proceed to consider the Prophetical Books.

The proof of their inspiration, which I shall lay before the reader, is not drawn from any external source, but arises from their contents.

* See particularly Deut. xviii. 15,—22.

They carry in their bosom the marks of their original; and manifest themselves to be the word of God by many clear predictions, which were most exactly fulfilled, long after they were uttered. These are so numerous, that, at present, we can only select a few as a specimen.

The fate of Egypt was thus foretold by Ezekiel: "It shall be the basest of kingdoms, neither shall it exalt itself any more above the nations; for I will diminish them, that they shall no more rule over the nations *." Accordingly we learn from history, that since the days of Ezekiel, it hath been successively subject to the Babylonians, the Persians, the Macedonians, the Romans, the Saracens, the Mamalucs, and last of all to the Turks, of whose empire it is, at this moment, a province, though in fact it be governed by a number of chiefs, called Beys, who are the very refuse of mankind, having risen by various means from the condition of slaves.

The same prophet foretold the ruin of Tyre. "I will make thee like the top of a rock: thou shalt be a place to spread nets upon: thou shalt be built no more: for I the Lord have spoken it, saith

* Ezek. xxix. 15.

ſaith the Lord God *." And how punctually hath the prediction been fulfilled! The city, which was a "mart of nations," as Iſaiah calls it, is now become a heap of ruins; and inſtead of being the reſort of ſhips from every region of the earth, it is viſited only by the boats of fiſhermen, whoſe nets are ſeen ſpread out to dry in the ſun.

Concerning Babylon it was predicted, that it ſhould be beſieged by the Medes and Elamites; that its river ſhould be dried up; that the city ſhould be taken in the time of a feaſt, while her mighty men were drunken; and that God would make the country around it a poſſeſſion for the bittern, and pools of water †. Now it is well known, that in conformity to theſe prophecies, Babylon was beſieged by the Medes and Perſians, who are the ſame with the Elamites; that Cyrus turned the Euphrates, which ran through the midſt of it, out of its courſe, that his troops might find a paſſage by its channel; that it was taken in the night during the diſſipation and ſecurity of a feaſt; and that the water of the river not having

* Ezek. xxvi. 14.

† Iſa. xiii. 17. xxi. 2. Jer. l. 38. li. 36, 39. 57. Iſa. xiv. 23.

ving been afterwards confined to its ancient bounds, the adjacent country was converted into a marsh, frequented by aquatic birds. If any man shall suspect, as infidels have often insinuated, but were never able to prove, concerning the prophecies of Scripture, that the prediction was written after the event, let him think of the following words, which are fulfilling at this hour. "And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees excellency, shall be, as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation: neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there, neither shall the shepherds make their folds there: But wild beasts of the desert shall lie there, and their houses shall be full of doleful creatures, and owls shall dwell there, and satyrs shall dance there. And the wild beasts of the islands shall cry in their desolate houses, and dragons in their pleasant palaces: and her time is near to come, and her days shall not be prolonged *." It is long since the populous city was turned into a solitude; long since it was converted into a chace for wild beasts by

* Isa. xiii. 19,---22.

by the kings of Perſia; long ſince it was rendered inacceſſible by the poiſonous animals which lodged in its ruins; long ſince it ceaſed to be known. So completely hath God, according to his word, ſwept it with "the beſom of deſtruction," that no man can now tell with certainty the place where it ſtood *.

Not to multiply particulars, there is one grand ſubject, in which as a centre all the lines of prophecy meet. This is the Meſſiah, to whom gave all the prophets witneſs. The minuteneſs, with which the circumſtances relative to him are foretold, is truly aſtoniſhing, when viewed in connection with the exactneſs of the accompliſhment. It is predicted, that he ſhould be a deſcendant of David, and that he ſhould be born of a virgin, in the town of Bethlehem; that having been anointed with the Holy Ghoſt, he ſhould aſſume the character of a public teacher; that he ſhould perform great and beneficent miracles; that his countrymen ſhould deſpiſe, and perſecute him, and put him to death; that he ſhould riſe from the grave, aſcend to heaven, triumph over his enemies, and though rejected by the Jews, be acknowledged

* Iſa. xiv. 23.

and ſerved by the Gentiles *. Nay the time of his death is particularly mentioned; and there are not obſcure hints of the manner of it, though crucifixion was a ſpecies of capital puniſhment unknown among the Jews, in the days of the prophets †. Theſe are only a few ſelected from a great variety of particulars.

There are two claſſes of predictions concerning the Meſſiah, of which the one deſcribes his humiliation, and the other his glory. He is repreſented, at one time, as a worm and no man, and, at another, as a prince higher than the kings of the earth; as a man of ſorrows, and as made exceeding glad with the light of God's countenance; as dying, and yet aboliſhing death; as deſpiſed and rejected, and as honoured and followed ‡. Theſe things are ſo contradictory, that it ſeems impoſſible, that they ſhould be united in the ſame perſon. Accordingly the Jews, unable to reconcile the

* Iſa. xi. 1. vii. 14. Mic. v. 2. Iſa. lxi. 1. xxxv. 5, 6. liii. 2,---10. Dan. ix. 26. Pſal. xvi. 9, 10. lxviii. 18. ii. 8. Iſa. xlii. 1,---4. xlix. 5, 6.

† Dan. ix. 24,---27. Pſal. xxii. 16, 17. Zech. xii. 10.

‡ Pſal. xxii. 6. lxxxix. 27. Iſa liii. 3. Pſal. xxi. 6. Iſa. liii. 10, 12. xxv. 8. Pſal. xxiii. 27,---31. lxxii. 15. 17.

the predicted humiliation of Chriſt, and the glory which neceſſarily belongs to his office, have invented, for the ſolution of the difficulty, the notion of two meſſiahs, of whom the one is to ſuffer, and the other to reign. But this character, which is apparently made up of inconſiſtent qualities, was realized in Jeſus Chriſt, who, though mean in reſpect of his manhood, is, in his divine perſon, the image of the inviſible God, and the firſt-born of every creature; who by dying conquered death, and by his ſorrows obtained for himſelf and his followers everlaſting felicity; who was contumeliouſly treated, and indignantly rejected by the Jews, but was preached to the Gentiles, and believed on in the world. A character, in which the extremes of abaſement and exaltation meet, in which the weakneſs of humanity is aſſociated with the power of the godhead, it could not have entered into the mind of any man to conceive. He would have diſjoined theſe extremes; he would have deſcribed a mortal like ourſelves, feeble and imperfect; or a God elevated above all created beings, by the infinitude of his attributes. When we ſee, therefore, this character not only drawn by the prophets,

phets, but exemplified in our Redeemer, we are convinced, that as, on the one hand, it could not be a creature of their fancy, ſo, on the other, it muſt have been ſuggeſted to them by divine revelation. Were they not artiſts, endowed, like Aholiab and Bezaleel, with a ſpirit of wiſdom, that they might paint the likeneſs of that ſingular perſonage, who, in the fulneſs of time, was to viſit the earth?

As the fulfilment of the propheoies of the Old Teſtament in Jeſus Chriſt, was a proof of his meſſiahſhip, to which he appealed, and from which his apoſtles reaſoned, in a moſt concluſive manner, with the Jews; ſo it is a proof of the divinity of their Scriptures, or of thoſe books, at leaſt, in which the prophecies are inſerted. Prophecy is founded on the foreſight of futurity; and the knowledge of futurity is a prerogative of the true God, by which he is diſtinguiſhed from the vanities of the Gentiles. "They have no knowledge, that ſet up the wood of their graven image, and pray unto a god that cannot ſave. Tell ye, and bring them near, yea let them take counſel together: who hath declared this from ancient time? who hath told it from that time?

have

have not I the Lord? and there is no God beſide me, a juſt God and a Saviour, there is none beſide me*." The foretelling, therefore, of future events, of which it was not poſſible to acquire the previous knowledge by any natural means, is an evidence, that God hath ſpoken by the prophet; and as the fulfilment of a prediction aſſures us, that the perſon who uttered it was divinely inſpired, ſo it warrants us to receive as divine every other thing which he hath delivered to us in the name of God. A prophecy, like a miracle, atteſts in general, the commiſſion of the perſon by whom it was ſpoken. The prophetical part of a book, therefore, not only proves itſelf to be inſpired, but proves likewiſe the inſpiration of the whole of the book; for God would not allow a man, to whom he had given his Spirit, to mix his own ſentiments with the revelation which he was empowered to make, and to impoſe his own ideas on the world, as of equal authority with thoſe which had been ſupernaturally communicated to him. Conformably to this rule, we infer, concerning ſome books of the Old Teſtament, that every part of them is inſpired,

* Iſa. xlv. 20, 21.

inſpired, becauſe we obſerve that ſome of the parts conſiſt of unequivocal predictions. A prophet would not lie to us in the name of God; nor though he were inclined, would he be ſuffered to deceive us. The power of God is certainly ſufficient to overrule all the propenſities of the human heart, and to ſuppreſs ſuch of them as would interfere with his deſigns; and we have the higheſt aſſurance from his holineſs and goodneſs, that he would not permit a man to abuſe a commiſſion from himſelf, in order the more ſucceſsfully to miſlead others, in the moſt momentous of all concerns, thoſe of the ſoul and eternity.

IV. I propoſed to make ſome remarks on thoſe books of the Old Teſtament, which are not included under the preceding diviſion.

Notwithſtanding this imperfection, I adopted that diviſion in preference to the Jewiſh which comprehends all the books, becauſe in conſequence of the very injudicious manner in which they are arranged by the latter, the ſame arguments which apply to ſome of one claſs, are not applicable to others. Prophetical and hiſtorical books

books are jumbled together. In the Jewiſh diviſion the holy writings include the Pſalms and the Chronicles. But the books of Chronicles are hiſtorical; and admit of a different kind of proof from that which is adapted to the Pſalms; for though many of theſe are purely devotional, yet I heſitate not to rank them as forming one collection among the prophetical books, not only becauſe David, the principal writer, is termed a prophet *, but becauſe they contain many predictions relative to the Meſſiah, his ſufferings, his glory, and his kingdom. The attentive reader would obſerve, that agreeably to this idea of them, ſeveral of the prophecies mentioned under the laſt head, were quoted from the Pſalms. Since, then, ſome books of the Old Teſtament have not yet been conſidered, it is neceſſary, before this chapter be cloſed, to ſay ſomething concerning them.

It would be highly unreaſonable to demand, and difficult, if not impoſſible, to give ſeparate proofs of each particular book. Separate proofs of each, indeed, are not neceſſary. As they conſtitute one volume, one whole, one entire revelation,

* Acts ii. 30.

revelation, if ſome of them, and eſpecially if the greater part of them be proved to be inſpired, the inſpiration of the reſt, which are ſo cloſely connected with them, cannot be denied. On this ground we feel no heſitation in acknowledging the authority of the books of Eſther, Ruth, Job, and the writings of Solomon. They have been always claſſed by the Jews with thoſe books, of the inſpiration of which we have undoubted evidence; and they are atteſted, in common with them, by Chriſt and his apoſtles.

Though, however, theſe conſiderations may ſuffice to remove any ſcruple in our minds, with regard to their divinity, it may be uſeful farther to obſerve, that on examining them, they appear to be equally worthy to be accounted inſpired, as other books of the ſame nature with them, concerning which, after the arguments formerly advanced, there can be no diſpute. The book of Eſther records a ſignal inſtance of the care of Providence over the church, and a deliverance not leſs wonderful than any of thoſe related in the other hiſtorical books. The book of Ruth will not ſeem undeſerving of a place in the ſacred volume,

volume, if we conſider, that, beſides giving an example of the obſervance of a peculiar law, it takes occaſion, from the marriage of that woman with Boaz, to trace the genealogy of his great grandſon David up to Judah, and is introductory to the hiſtory of that eminent progenitor and type of the Meſſiah. The ſublimity of the book of Job equals that of any other portion of Scripture, and leads us to attribute the compoſition of it to a higher author than man. The wiſdom diſplayed in the writings of Solomon, correſponds with the exalted character which he bears in Scripture; and far exceeds what in his circumſtances he could be ſuppoſed to have acquired by natural means. This ſuperiority is acknowledged by a celebrated author, who hath pleaded the cauſe of infidelity with inſidious eloquence. Having quoted theſe words, "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity;" as the words of Solomon, he ſays in a note,—"If the Eccleſiaſtes be truly a work of Solomon, and not, like Prior's poem, a pious and moral compoſition of more recent times, in his name, and on the ſubject of his repentance. The latter is the opinion of the learned and free-ſpirited Grotius; and indeed the Eccleſiaſtes

and the Proverbs display a larger compass of thought and experience than seem to belong either to a Jew or a king *." The suspicion, founded on their intrinsic excellence, that they are the works of some other person of a different rank and nation, is proved to be groundless, by the unanimous testimony of all past ages; and as we certainly know that they were written by Solomon, we may convert this concession of an enemy into an argument for their heavenly origin.

* Gibbon's History, chap. xli. Note 33.

CHAP.

CHAP. VI.

PROOFS OF THE INSPIRATION OF THE SCRIPTURES IN GENERAL.

BESIDES the proofs of the inſpiration of the Scriptures in the preceding chapters, there are ſome arguments of a more general nature, which it would be unwiſe to overlook, not only becauſe nothing ſhould be omitted, which is calculated to confirm our faith, and arm us againſt the aſſaults of infidelity; but becauſe they are ſufficient, independently of every other conſideration, to beget a ſtrong conviction in our minds. They turn chiefly on the internal evidences of the divinity of the Scriptures, ariſing from the ſentiments contained in them, the ſpirit which they breathe, and the effects which they produce on the ſoul of man. Different kinds of evidence affect

fect perſons of different diſpoſitions. Some are moſt pleaſed with a chain of reaſoning which bears a reſemblance to the demonſtrations of ſcience; while to others that evidence is more agreeable, which is addreſſed to the moral principles and feelings of the heart. Some demand external proofs of the truth of revelation; others fix their attention principally on the arguments ariſing from its genius and tendency. It is by means of both kinds of evidence that we may expect ſuch a perſuaſion of the inſpiration of the Scriptures to be produced, as ſhall riſe ſuperior to the ſophiſtry and the ſarcaſms of unbelievers. The impreſſion which miracles and prophecy have made upon our minds, will become ſtill deeper, when we perceive, that the revelation which they atteſt, has unequivocal characters of divinity ſtamped upon it, which ſhow it to be worthy of all acceptation.

Of the ſix arguments which I propoſe to illuſtrate in this chapter, five are drawn from the Scriptures themſelves; while the laſt infers their inſpiration from the care of Providence with reſpect to them.

I. The

I. The inſpiration of the Scriptures may be proved from their ſublimity.

By terming them ſublime, I do not mean that they are written in pompous language. This, indeed, is the idea which ſome form of ſublimity; but they betray the wretchedneſs of their taſte, and their complete ignorance of the ſubject. Sublimity lies not in the expreſſion, ſo much as in the ſentiment. It is the elevation of the thoughts; and it is the ſubject which raiſes the ſtyle, not the ſtyle which gives dignity to the ſubject. Nay a paſſage may be ſublime, which is compoſed in the moſt ſimple and artleſs manner. No terms of art are employed in the Scriptures; no rhetorical flights are found in them; no attempt is made by the writers to communicate ſplendour or majeſty to their diſcourſes, by means of artificial decorations; and yet they as far tranſcend the higheſt efforts of human eloquence, as the ſky adorned with millions of ſtars ſurpaſſes the puny imitations of it by the ingenuity of mortals.

When we caſt our eyes over the Scriptures, we perceive in them an extent and ſublimity of conception, which make the works of the boldeſt

and moſt comprehenſive genius appear mean and grovelling. The ideas, held out by the ſacred writers, of God and his perfections, of the dependence of all creatures upon him as the Author of their exiſtence, of his power over all nature, whoſe fierceſt elements yield unreſiſting obedience to his will, of his univerſal government, of the deſigns of his providence, and of the iſſue of his adminiſtrations, are perfectly original, immediately recommend themſelves to our reaſon, and by their magnificence convince us, that it was from a higher ſource than reaſon that they flowed. The unaſſiſted human mind is not capable of thinking ſo nobly on divine things. We debaſe the loftieſt of all ſubjects by the meanneſs of our ſentiments, and the flatneſs and inſipidity of our language. A ſyſtem, therefore, which diſplays ſuch elevation of thought, and is ſo agreeable to our beſt conceptions of God, may well be ſuppoſed to have emanated from himſelf, who alone can enable the ſtammering tongues of mortals to ſpeak of him in a manner worthy of his infinite dignity.

If we turn our attention to particular inſtances of ſublimity, they are ſo numerous, that it is difficult

ficult to make a ſelection. Can any thing be more ſublime than the account of the creation given by Moſes? There is no attempt made to aſtoniſh the imagination by an elaborate deſcription; but if I may ſpeak ſo, Omnipotence is exhibited to our view naked and unadorned. The Almighty ſpeaks, and it is done; he commands, and it ſtands faſt. God ſaid, "Let there be light, and there was light *." A heathen writer hath quoted this paſſage, as an inſtance of the ſublime; and I will venture to aſſert, that a more noble example of it could not have been furniſhed, by all the poets, hiſtorians, and orators, whoſe writings he had peruſed †. What can be compared with the following deſcription of the power of God over the univerſe? "Who hath hardened himſelf againſt him, and hath proſpered? which removeth the mountains, and they know not; which overturneth them in his anger; which ſhaketh the earth out of her place, and the pillars thereof tremble: which commandeth the ſun and it ſhineth not, and ſealeth up the ſtars; which alone ſpreadeth out the heavens, and treadeth upon the waves of the ſea; which maketh Arcturus,

* Gen. i. 3. † Vid. Longin. de Sublimitate, Sect. ix.

Arcturus, Orion, and Pleiades, and the chambers of the south; which doth great things past finding out, yea and wonders without number *." Nothing can be conceived more calculated to fill our minds with astonishment and awe, than this representation of the greatness of Jehovah: "Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand? and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance? Who hath directed the Spirit of the Lord, or being his counsellor hath taught him? With whom took he counsel, and who instructed him, and taught him in the path of judgment, and taught him knowledge, and shewed to him the way of understanding? Behold the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold he taketh up the isles as a very little thing. And Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor the beasts thereof sufficient for a burnt-offering. All nations before him are as nothing, and they are counted to him less than nothing and vanity. It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the

* Job ix. 4,---10.

the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as graſhoppers; that ſtretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and ſpreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in: that bringeth the princes to nought; he maketh the judges of the earth as vanity *. In all theſe inſtances the language is ſimple; the thoughts are worthy of that Being, whoſe majeſty and glory are deſcribed.

But of examples there is no end. They meet the eye every where, eſpecially in the Pſalms, Job, and the prophetical writings; and they are found, not only in the compoſitions of David and Iſaiah, men, from whoſe rank and opportunities we might have expected elevation of mind, the former being a king, and the latter, if not one of the royal family, having free acceſs to the court; but likewiſe in thoſe of Amos, whoſe want of education and habits of life promiſed only the moſt common thoughts expreſſed in the homely language of the vulgar. There is nothing more ſublime in the Scriptures themſelves, than the following paſſage in the propheeies of the herdſman of Tekoah; nothing which excels or equals it in any human compoſition: "For lo! he that formeth

* Iſa. xl. 12,---17. 22, 23.

formeth the mountains, and createth the wind, and declareth unto man what is his thought, that maketh the morning darkneſs, and treadeth upon the high places of the earth, the Lord, the God of Hoſts, is his name *."

Examples of the ſublime are not ſo frequent in the New Teſtament, which is in general written in a plainer ſtyle, as it conſiſts, for the moſt part, of hiſtorical narration, in which ſimplicity is one of the beſt ornaments; and of epiſtles written with a deſign to inſtruct thoſe to whom they were addreſſed, in the doctrines of faith, and the duties of the Chriſtian life. Yet it would be eaſy to ſelect a variety of paſſages deſcribing the glory and perfections of God, and that auguſt and ſolemn ſcene which will cloſe all human things, which equal any of thoſe found in the Old Teſtament †. There are three deſcriptions of the Supreme Being, which, in a few ſimple words, convey more juſt and elevated ideas of him, than the moſt elaborate and ſplendid compoſitions of human genius and eloquence. "God is

* Amos iv. 13.

† 1 Tim. vi. 15, 16. 1 Theſſ. iv. 15,—17. Rev. xx. 11,—15. &c.

is a Spirit;" "God is light;" "God is love *." In theſe ſhort ſentences, more is taught concerning him than philoſophy had ever learned; more matter is compreſſed, than was ſpread over the pages of all the wiſe men among the Gentiles. It is only neceſſary to peruſe their writings, to be convinced, that none of them ever entertained equally ſublime conceptions of the ſpirituality, the purity, and the benevolence of the Deity.

The inference from all theſe particulars will occur to every reader. That ſentiments ſo lofty and dignified ſhould flow from the pens of writers who were, for the moſt part, illiterate; that they ſhould originate with Jews, who, compared with the poliſhed nations of antiquity, were a rude and barbarous people, is undoubtedly very ſurpriſing; and when we obſerve, that their writings throw thoſe of all other men into the ſhade, can we avoid the concluſion, that their faculties were elevated by ſupernatural influence; that their thoughts are the dictates of heavenly wiſdom, not the offſpring of their own minds; and that the appropriate language, in which they are expreſſed, was ſuggeſted to them by the Spirit of God? I know

* John iv. 24. 1 John i. 5. iv. 8.

know, indeed, that ſome men have dared to arraign the Bible as deſtitute of either ſublimity or beauty, and to prefer to it ſome ancient writings, which, though unqueſtionably excellent, it hath long been the faſhion of pedants to praiſe beyond the limits of ſenſe and decency; but I know, likewiſe, that their taſte was as corrupted, as their impiety was deteſtable. The Koran of Mahomet hath been celebrated for its eloquence; and the impoſtor himſelf, in the want of real miracles, pretended that the compoſition was ſo admirable as to demonſtrate its claim to inſpiration. But the moſt ſublime paſſages have been evidently ſtolen from the Scriptures, and have loſt a portion of their original dignity by the changes which the deceiver hath made upon them, in order to conceal his depredations. When compared, therefore, with parallel paſſages in the ſacred books, their grandeur is loſt "in the blaze of a greater light *." "Its loftieſt ſtrains," ſays a writer by no means partial to the Scriptures, "muſt yield to the ſublime ſimplicity of the book of Job, compoſed in a remote age, in the ſame

* White's Sermons, Sermon vi.

ſame country, and in the ſame language *." His idea of the language, in which the book of Job was written, may be diſputed; but his character of its compoſition, and the preference which he gives it to the Koran are proofs, that laying aſide for a moment the prejudices of infidelity, he hath decided according to the dictates of a juſt taſte, and a ſound underſtanding.

II. A ſecond argument for the inſpiration of the Scriptures is drawn from their piety.

The ſacred books breathe a ſpirit of devotion towards God, of holy reverence, of faith, of reſignation, of zeal for his glory. Their tendency is to form in our minds juſt and elevated conceptions of his nature; to make us acquainted with the relations in which he ſtands to us, and to impreſs upon our hearts a ſenſe of the obligations which flow from them; to beget and cheriſh the diſpoſition and the habit of contemplating him in every object and occurrence, and of referring all things to him; to inſpire us with the ſentiments and affections, which correſpond to his infinite excellencies, and are a due return for his benefi-

* Gibbon's Hiſtory, Chap. L.

cence; and to excite us to conſecrate ourſelves to his ſervice, and to glorify him with our ſouls and our bodies which are his. They ſeem to have been written with the expreſs deſign to lead us to admire the perfections and the works of God; to praiſe his goodneſs, or adore his juſtice, in the diſpenſations of providence; and to yield cheerful and conſcientious obedience to his laws.

In human compoſitions, atheiſtical and irreligious ſentiments are too often introduced; or the ſubject of religion is purpoſely avoided, becauſe diſagreeable to the author, or to thoſe whom he wiſhes to be his readers; or when it is the avowed intention of the writer to treat of God, and our duty to him, ideas are brought forward of a nature fitted to cool, and to repreſs the emotions of piety. While too much, ſometimes all, is aſcribed to the wiſdom and virtue of man, or to the power of natural cauſes, God is kept out of our view, our dependence upon him is forgotten, and our gratitude is weakened or extinguiſhed. This will be found, on due conſideration, to be the tendency, and the real effect even of many writings which profeſs to be religious. But in the Scriptures every thing leads us directly to God.

God. All good is repreſented as flowing from his hand; all events are ordered by his wiſdom; all men are the inſtruments, which he employs to execute his purpoſes. We are conducted behind the curtain, and ſhewn the hand which moves all the ſprings of the mighty machine; which cauſes all the revolutions in the univerſe. One great agent appears, whom creatures animate and inanimate ſerve. Their powers, their talents, their virtues, their atchievements, inſtead of being placed in oppoſition to him as advancing a rival claim to our admiration and praiſe, conſpire to diſplay his glory, and to elevate our ideas of him, by being exhibited both as the gifts of his bounty, and as the means by which he carries forward his plans to their completion. In ſhort, by the light of the Scriptures we behold him in every place, and in every event; and their manifeſt deſign is to make him the continual object of our meditation, our confidence, our love, and our homage.

To the Scriptures men are indebted for all their juſt notions of God; and if there be ſome places of the earth, where worthy conceptions are formed of his eſſence, his atributes, his government,

vernment, his worſhip, and the obedience which we owe to him, they are thoſe places alone, in which the books, which we hold to be inſpired, are known. There is hardly any perſon who is not apprized of the ſuperiority of Chriſtian to heathen nations, ancient and modern, in their ideas of religion. The conceptions which a peaſant among us entertains of the divine Being are more exalted, and the worſhip which he offers to him, is purer and more dignified, than were the conceptions and the worſhip of the moſt enlightened and devout philoſophers of Greece or Rome. "The moſt ignorant Chriſtian," ſays a ſenſible writer, "knows more of God, of true religion, and of moral obligations, than the moſt knowing Pagan that ever lived. A modern philoſopher would turn a downright adorer of Plato or Cicero, ſhould he find ſuch a lecture in either of them concerning the unity, the omnipreſence, the omniſcience, the juſtice, mercy, and power of God, concerning the creation of the world, the degeneracy and corruption of human nature, and the means of its recovery, as a poor tradeſman or farmer delivers to his children on a Sunday evening *."

Now

* Deiſm Revealed, Vol. ii. page 55.

Now reaſon was the ſame in the Gentiles as in us, and in ſome of them it exiſted in higher perfection than in the moſt of us; the book of nature was open to their inſpection as well as to ours; and their diligence in ſtudying it cannot be exceeded. How, then, ſhall we account for our ſuperiority; a ſuperiority which is ſeen in the loweſt of us when compared with the higheſt of them? How ſhall we account for it but by remembering, that beſides the book of nature with which alone they were favoured, we enjoy the book of revelation? Some juſt notions of God prevail among Mahometans; but they are derived from the Scriptures, to which, as we have formerly obſerved, the Koran is indebted for its pureſt ſentiments, and its ſublimeſt paſſages.—The argument which is drawn from the piety of the Scriptures to prove their inſpiration, we ſhall connect with another argument furniſhed by

III. Their purity or holineſs.

Human writings uſually bear evident marks of the moral imperfection of their authors. If there be any exceptions, they are ſuch writings as have

been fashioned most exactly after the model of the Scriptures. Something is often found in them to provoke and enflame the passions, to justify or palliate their excesses. Even systems of morality are extremely deficient both in precepts and in prohibitions: some vices are tolerated either in whole or in part, and some virtues are omitted. Virtue is not carried to its highest pitch; allowances are made for human frailties, which, in plain language, are the irregular passions and inclinations of human nature; and less respect is paid to the purity of the motives of action than to the action itself. The intelligent reader will perceive that my subject leads me to speak only of such writings as have been drawn up by persons who had not the assistance of revelation. Yet the remarks now made may be extended to too many writings of Christians, even to some which have been much admired and celebrated as teaching the purest religion and morality. The depravity of man is a subtile poison, which insinuates itself into every thing that comes into contact with it, and whose operations the most powerful antidotes cannot entirely prevent.

On the Scriptures there is engraved in legible characters

characters the ſame inſcription which adorned the High prieſt's mitre, "Holineſs to the Lord." Indeed we cannot but conſider them as a tranſcript of the divine purity, when we obſerve how careful they are to exhibit God as glorious in holineſs; and with what earneſtneſs they recommend conformity to him as our honour and our happineſs. To every relation and condition of life, they extend their authority, and preſcribe the duties, which in that relation we are bound to perform. They grant no toleration to any of the works of the fleſh; but by one comprehenſive ſentence they condemn them all as offenſive to God, and inconſiſtent with ſalvation. No liberty is allowed to any of thoſe appetites and paſſions, which operate moſt powerfully in our nature, and to which falſe religions, finding themſelves unable to controul them, are neceſſitated to give ſome indulgence, as covetouſneſs, ambition, revenge, ſenſuality. They inculcate all thoſe virtues, and condemn all thoſe vices, which had ever been the ſubjects of human injunction and reſtraint; they preſcribe duties which the purblind wiſdom of philoſophers and ſtateſmen had not diſcovered, and ſtigmatize as criminal, certain tempers and practices, which they had

had permitted as innocent, or recommended as praiſe-worthy. Not only do the diſorders of the life fall under their diſapprobation; but the corrupt principle from which they proceed, even when it lurks unſeen, and confines its activity to the heart, is treated with equal ſeverity. The law of man ſays only, "Thou ſhalt not ſteal;" but the law of the Scriptures, carrying its prohibition much higher, ſays, "Thou ſhalt not covet." The law of man forbids adultery; but the law of the Scriptures, the firſt emotion of criminal deſire. "Ye have heard that it was ſaid by them of old time, Thou ſhalt not commit adultery. But I ſay unto you, that whoſoever looketh on a woman to luſt after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart*." In a word, it is their manifeſt deſign to deſtroy ſin in its root, and in its branches, to eruſh it in the bud, as well as to blaſt its flowers, and its fruits. They aim at ſubduing and finally eradicating our ſinful appetites and affections; and at eſtabliſhing as the ſupreme law of our thoughts, words, and actions, the will of God.

Let us now conjoin theſe two qualities of the Scriptures

* Matth. v. 27, 28.

Scriptures, and ask from what source a book so pure and so pious hath proceeded. It cannot be the work of man, because it is too perfect to come from so imperfect a being. All his works of this nature, give manifest proofs of his weakness and depravity. If, however, we should admit for a moment, that the Scriptures are a human production, it is plain that the authors must have been either good or bad men. That they were good men, is impossible; for no good man would act the part of an impious impostor, and pretend a divine inspiration which he did not enjoy. A good man would not speak or act wickedly, even for God; and besides, this very book, which persons of this character are supposed to have written, denounces the most dreadful judgments on false prophets, who forge a commission from heaven, and condemns liars of every description, to suffer the everlasting torments of hell. Pious frauds, or the use of artifice and falsehood in propagating the truth, and endeavouring to promote the spiritual interests of mankind, though they have been countenanced by the approbation and the practice of some Christians, are contrary both to the letter, and to the spirit of their religion.

gion*. Common ſenſe forbids us to believe, that the writers of the ſacred books, if they were impoſtors, would, without any neceſſity, have paſſed ſentence on themſelves, and inculcated ſuch moral precepts, as were repugnant to their own conduct, and muſt have rendered them, if they were ever detected, the objects of univerſal execration. It is equally evident, that the Scriptures were not fabricated by bad men. Would they have deviſed the moſt devout ſyſtem of religion, and the pureſt ſyſtem of morality, which were ever preſented to mankind? Men who hated and diſobeyed God, would not have taught us to love and ſerve him; they who took pleaſure in ſin, would not have repreſented it as abominable, and employed the moſt powerful arguments to diſſuade us from committing it. Nay I will venture to aſſert, that bad men have a judgment too inaccurate, and a taſte too groſs, to be able to compoſe ſuch a book as the Bible, in which moral diſtinctions are ſo refined, the corrupt principle is traced to its inmoſt receſſes, and detected under its moſt ſpecious diſguiſes, and certain actions which are admired by the world, as the moſt ſublime efforts

* Rom. iii. 5,---8.

efforts of virtue, are pronounced to be of no value. The mode of thinking in morals, which appears in the Scriptures, is the moſt diſtant imaginable, from that of men who were the ſlaves of vice. It is ſuperior to the ideas even of the moſt virtuous men, who have not learned to think from it.

It being manifeſt, then, that the Scriptures are not the work of men of any deſcription, it remains that we attribute them to God, whoſe image and ſuperſcription they bear. Their piety and purity are features, by which they are known to be his offspring. If they inſpire thoſe ſentiments and affections, which are ſuitable to his character, and the relations in which he ſtands to us; and if they teach us to deteſt that abominable thing which he hates, and to cultivate thoſe virtues which he approves; who can doubt that they are a revelation from himſelf, intended to form us into his likeneſs, and to enable us to fulfil the purpoſes for which we were brought into exiſtence?

IV. The efficacy of the Scriptures furniſhes another argument in favour of their inſpiration.

By

By their efficacy, I mean the power which they have exerted in former times, and which they continue to exert, in changing the principles, and ſubduing the paſſions of men, in purifying their hearts, in inſpiring them with undaunted courage, and elevating them above all earthly and ſelfiſh conſiderations; in fine, in cauſing ſuch moral and ſpiritual effects, as no means merely human, would have been ſufficient to produce.

We are naturally led to take notice, in the firſt place, of the ſucceſs with which the goſpel was crowned at its firſt publication. Multitudes, in all the nations to which the miniſtrations of the apoſtles extended, renouncing the religion of their fathers, the peace which they enjoyed, and the luſts in which they had lived in their ignorance, aſſumed the profeſſion of Chriſtianity, though it demanded many coſtly ſacrifices, and difficult ſervices; and this was done, not only by the poor, who had nothing to loſe, but by many of the rich and noble, whoſe eſtates and honours were at ſtake; not only by the vulgar, who might have been eaſily impoſed upon, but by men of talents and education, verſed in learning and philoſophy, whom nothing but the irreſiſtible evidence of truth

truth could have perſuaded to diſclaim their former wiſdom as folly. There is not in all hiſtory ſo aſtoniſhing an event, as the converſion of the world to the Chriſtian faith. None of thoſe motives, which uſually influence men to change their opinions, had any ſhare in effecting it. On the contrary, it was oppoſed by a regard to preſent intereſt, honour, ſafety, eaſe, and by all the corrupt propenſities of the heart. This converſion, too, was not accompliſhed by worldly might and power, by ſubtile reaſonings and captivating eloquence, but by a ſimple ſtatement of the facts and doctrines of the goſpel. Hence we have inferred, in a preceding chapter, that miracles muſt have been wrought by the firſt preachers of the truth, to prove their commiſſion from God, and to awaken the attention of mankind.

I now advance a ſtep farther, and ſay, that miracles alone will not fully account for their ſucceſs, as is evident from this conſideration, that many, who witneſſed the wonderful works performed by the apoſtles, did not acknowledge the truth of their doctrine. I know, indeed, that the rapid progreſs of the goſpel, in the firſt ages, hath been ſometimes attributed ſolely to the miracles

racles by which it was confirmed; but I know, likewiſe, that Chriſtianity hath not ſeldom been maintained on unchriſtian grounds. When writers againſt infidelity deny, or overlook the neceſſity of the illuminating and regenerating influences of the Spirit, they defend a religion, a fundamental article of which they do not know, or they are too proud to admit. Without miracles the world could not have been required to believe, for reaſonable beings cannot be convinced without evidence; and God, in propoſing a revelation to them, will deal with them agreeably to their intelligent nature. But that the conviction of the underſtanding is not always followed by the conſent of the heart, is plain from the inſtance of the Phariſees, who, not being able to deny the truth of the miracles of Chriſt, malignantly aſcribed them to the aſſiſtance of Satan *. A ſupernatural influence, therefore, acting on the minds of thoſe whom they addreſſed, muſt have accompanied the diſcourſes of the firſt Chriſtian miſſionaries, rendering them effectual to conquer ſtrong prejudices, controul imperious luſts, and cauſe a complete revolution in the ideas

* Mark iii. 22,---30.

ideas, principles, inclinations, and conduct of myriads of converts. Now what the diſcourſes of the apoſtles did, their writings may be ſaid to have done. There is no reaſon for making any diſtinction. The ſyſtem of doctrine which they have written is preciſely the ſame with that which they preached. It is the ſubſtance of their ſermons, a ſuccinct account of that revelation which they detailed more copiouſly in public; and by conſequence it may be juſtly conſidered as having exerted all that energy, by which, as one of them obſerves, "imaginations and every high thing which exalted itſelf againſt the knowledge of God were caſt down, and every thought was brought into captivity to Chriſt *." The power of their doctrine is produced by the apoſtles themſelves as a proof of its divinity. "The Jews require a ſign, and the Greeks ſeek after wiſdom; but we preach Chriſt crucified, unto the Jews a ſtumbling-block, and unto the Greeks fooliſhneſs; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Chriſt the power of God, and the wiſdom of God †."

A ſecond proof of the efficacy of the Scriptures

* 2 Cor. x. 5. † 1 Cor. i. 22, 24. Rom. i. 16.

tures is furniſhed by the reſolution, with which they have inſpired multitudes of both ſexes, and of every age, to part with all their intereſt in this world, and to ſurrender life itſelf amidſt the ſevereſt torments, rather than renounce the profeſſion of the goſpel. The compoſure, the firmneſs, the unconquerable patience, the triumphant joy of the martyrs in the early ages, ſtruck the ſpectators with aſtoniſhment, and prevailed upon many of them to embrace a religion, which proved itſelf to be divine, by raiſing human nature above itſelf. Now, what animated theſe holy men to ſubmit to tortures, the bare recital of which makes us ſhudder with horror? Were they madmen who had no purpoſe in view? Were their nerves formed of iron, and their bodies inſenſible of pain? No; they felt as other men feel; and they knew the value of life too well to throw it away. But they were aſſured of the truth of the revelation contained in the Scriptures; and as they accounted it their duty to aſſert its truth in the face of the moſt formidable dangers, ſo they were borne up, in circumſtances apparently more than ſufficient to have overcome their courage and conſtancy, by its

hopes

hopes and conſolations. It was in the expectation of that recompenſe which it promiſes to the faithful, that they cheerfully ſuffered the loſs of all things on the earth. They ought to be conſidered, therefore, as having ſhed their blood to atteſt their perſuaſion of the Divine authority of the Scriptures; and this was more particularly the caſe with reſpect to ſuch of them, as refuſed to redeem their lives, by delivering up the ſacred books to be deſtroyed by their perſecutors.

Farther, their efficacy appears in the authority which they exerciſe over wicked men, on whoſe paſſions they impoſe reſtraints, and in whoſe boſoms they awaken bitter remorſe for the paſt, and a dread of a future reckoning, which diſturbs them, not only in the hours of ſolitude, when they are alone with their conſciences, but in the midſt of their jovial companions, and in the ſcenes of diſſipation. That they exert this power in the ſecret retirement of the heart we learn from the confeſſions of the penitent, who tell us how unhappy they often were in the days of their folly; and from the exclamations of the convinced, but unreclaimed, who ſuffer the horrors of deſpair. There is, I may

add, a tacit acknowledgment of their power in the eagerneſs diſcovered by the impious and profligate, to diſprove their authority. That is evidently an eye-ſore, which a perſon is inceſſantly endeavouring to remove out of his ſight. If the wicked did not *feel* the Scriptures to be at war with their happineſs, though they would not befriend them, yet they would let them alone.

In a word, the change produced, by means of the Scriptures, in the tempers and behaviour of men, ſhows them to be poſſeſſed of an efficacy greater than was ever exerted by any other ſyſtem of doctrine. Philoſophy could boaſt of two or three, whom its eloquent exhortations had perſuaded to abandon their profligate courſes; "but what are theſe few examples," ſays Origen, "when compared with the multitudes, whom the plain and unadorned doctrines of the goſpel have turned from diſſipation to ſobriety, from diſhoneſty to juſtice, from timidity to a bold contempt of death for the ſake of religion *." That which we call the word of God makes the ſenſual pure, the proud humble, the revengeful forgiving, the ſelfiſh diſintereſted, the ſullen and moroſe,

* Vide Orig. contra Celſum, Lib. iii. page 152.

moroſe, courteous and kind. Its efficacy cannot be better deſcribed than in the well known words of Lactantius: "Give me an angry, abuſive, paſſionate man; and with a few of the words of God, I will render him as meek as a lamb. Give me an avarieious and niggardly man; and I will return him liberal, and with unſparing hand diſtributing his money. Give me a man who is afraid of pain and death; and he ſhall preſently contemn croſſes, fires, and torments of every kind. Give me a luſtful, adulterous, leeherous man; and you ſhall ſee him ſober, chaſte, continent. Give me a cruel and blood-thirſty man; his fury ſhall be inſtantly changed into clemency. Give me a man who is unjuſt, fooliſh, and a notorious offender; and he ſhall immediately become equitable, prudent, and innocent. So great is the force of divine wiſdom, that when infuſed into the breaſt it expels, by a ſingle effort, folly the mother of ſins*." Such moral miracles it hath wrought in every age; and as there are many dead, ſo there are not a few living proofs of its irreſiſtible power. Hence it is compared to a light which diſpels our darkneſs; to a fire which

* Vide Lactant. Lib. iii. cap. 25.

which kindles our affections; to a hammer which breaks our hearts in pieces; to a two-edged ſword which pierces into the inmoſt receſſes of the ſoul; to a ſeed which changes our nature, and renders us fruitful in holineſs.

Perhaps it may not be improper to introduce, in this place, for the illuſtration of the preſent argument, a compariſon between the manners of Heathen and Chriſtian nations. I know, indeed, that in the opinion of thoſe who have been accuſtomed to hear, and are ſo ſimple as to believe the inſidious declamations of infidels, and the looſe panegyrics of ſome ill-informed or ill-adviſed friends of revelation, the compariſon will rather be unfavourable to our purpoſe. The virtues of certain nations are celebrated in the higheſt ſtrains, with an evident deſign to inſinuate, that, with the light of nature alone, which we pronounce to be inſufficient, they have attained a degree of moral excellence unequalled by thoſe who enjoy the boaſted advantages of the goſpel*. With the ſame

* Much has been ſaid in praiſe of the virtues of the Chineſe; a people, concerning whom, even after the late Britiſh and Dutch embaſſies, we have only imperfect information. We have learned,

ſame intention, ſome characters in the Gentile world have been commended with the utmoſt extravagance of praiſe. The teſtimony of the ancients, who were beſt acquainted with their hiſtory, affirming that thoſe men were guilty of the moſt

ed, however, that about 2000 children, according to other accounts 3000, are annually expoſed in the ſtreets of Pekin; and we may judge of the ſtate of manners in China from the ſaying of one of its Philoſophers, that he would conſider as a prodigy of virtue the man, who being alone with a woman ſhould not offer violence to her. From ſuch competitors, Chriſtian nations have nothing to fear. It is curious, that the high virtues of this nation ſhould appear only in the writings of ſome infidel philoſophers who were never out of Europe; while almoſt all travellers agree in charging them with the meaneſt and moſt odious vices. There is the ſame contradiction between the fine deſcriptions, which are ſometimes given of the innocence and ſimplicity of the natives of India, and the plain, unembelliſhed accounts of thoſe who have lived among them, and witneſſed their manners. We are aſſured by the latter, that they are a very depraved people; and the more intimately we are acquainted with the hiſtory of heathen nations, the more fully ſhall we be convinced of the truth of this charge brought againſt the Gentiles in general, that they "walk in the vanity of their mind, having the underſtanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, becauſe of the blindneſs of their heart;" and that "being paſt feeling, they have given themſelves over unto laſciviouſneſs, to work all uncleanneſs with greedineſs," Eph. iv. 17,---19.

moſt abominable crimes, is either paſſed over in ſilence, or without evidence, and even the leaſt ſhadow of proof, repreſented as falſe and calumnious. The vices of Chriſtians are collected with malignant induſtry, and exhibited in all their aggravations. Yet when declamation is ſet aſide, and facts only are attended to, the balance will incline in favour of Chriſtian nations. A man who ſhould practiſe ſodomy, lend his wife to his friends, and almoſt in every ſentence profane the name of God, would be abhorred by us as a monſter; though ſuch a man was admired by the Gentiles as a paragon of virtue. There were ſeveral enormous evils which diſgraced the moſt celebrated nations of antiquity; but which are now either entirely aboliſhed, or have received a check, and exiſt, not as in former times, under the protection and countenance of law, but in contempt of its authority, or by eluding its vigilance; ſuch as pederaſty, the expoſing of children, domeſtic ſlavery, the cruel and murderous ſhows of the amphitheatre, a community of wives, and fornication, which ſome philoſophers recommended by their example, and their precepts. I may add, that, in Chriſtian nations, there is a

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ſpirit of beneficence unknown during the reign of heatheniſm, which is diſplayed in the erection of infirmaries, hoſpitals, almshouſes, charity ſchools, &c. and in the ready and liberal relief which is afforded to the neceſſitous and unfortunate. No man, I am perſuaded, whoſe ideas of morality are enlarged and refined, will think the aſſertion extravagant, and incapable of the moſt ſatisfactory proof, that it would be eaſy to find in a Chriſtian country, even among its peaſants and mechanics, thouſands, with whom the moſt accompliſhed philoſopher of heatheniſm might bluſh to be compared. The improvement of our manners cannot be attributed to our improvements in ſciences and arts; for it hath been uniformly obſerved, that the progreſs of nations in refinement is accompanied with a correſpondent progreſs in luxury and diſſipation. Our ſuperior morals are the conſequence of a more perfect law; of precepts inculcated, and principles inſpired by revelation. Chriſtianity hath eſtabliſhed a new, and more exalted ſtandard of virtue. That there is much immorality in Chriſtian nations is indeed to be lamented, but is no more than we had reaſon to expect, ſince our religion does not operate

as a charm, without the knowledge and concurrence of the perſon, in whoſe caſe it is employed; but as a medicine, which cures thoſe alone, by whom it is taken. If men will not attend to its evidence, nor acquaint themſelves with its doctrines and motives, but reject it at the ſuggeſtion of prejudice and faſhion, or while they profeſs to believe it, ſuffer their minds to be diverted from it, by the cares and pleaſures of life; they are not more within the ſphere of its actual influence, in conſequence of their moral circumſtances, than if they lived in a country, on which the goſpel had never ſhed its ſalutary rays. We know, at the ſame time, that manners have always been moſt pure, when the Scriptures were moſt ſtudied and revered; and it is ſingular, that the greateſt atrocities in modern times have been perpetrated by a nation, which in its public character had renounced Chriſtianity, and in which the ſacred books had long been unknown, or deſpiſed.

This compariſon will perhaps ſeem a digreſſion. To bring the argument, therefore, to a concluſion, the effects wrought by the Scriptures being manifeſtly ſuch, as no human means have ever been

been observed to produce, is it not consonant to sound reason, to acknowledge as their author Almighty God, who hath the hearts of all men in his hands, and turns them as the rivers of waters? The propriety of this inference is still more apparent from a review of the nature of those effects. All the energy of the Scriptures is displayed in making men better; in removing their imperfections; in inspiring them with pious affections towards God, and benevolent dispositions towards their brethren; in improving their moral faculties, and transforming them into the image of him who created them. Their whole force is exerted in restoring that state of innocence and purity, which, tradition informs us, was the original state of mankind; and in which alone our reason pronounces it to be agreeable to the moral attributes of God, to have placed his intelligent offspring. Here then his finger is perceived; and we conclude that from him hath proceeded that Book, which leads us to him, and, renewing his likeness in our souls, qualifies us again for serving and enjoying him.

V. The harmony of the Scriptures ſupplies a fifth argument in proof of their inſpiration.

A religion deviſed by men, a ſyſtem of philoſophy, or a code of laws, will undergo, in the courſe of a few centuries, very great alterations, in conſequence of new diſcoveries, and changes in ideas and manners. Opinions and maxims, which were once in high repute, will be exploded; and principles and practices of modern date, will be ſubſtituted in their room. Such, on examination, is the actual hiſtory of the human mind, and its productions. Falſe religions, which have had ſome continuance, are found, when viewed at two diſtant periods, to have varied in dogmas and obſervances, in the objects and the forms of their worſhip. Schemes of philoſophy appear, and vaniſh like the tranſient modes of faſhion; and principles, of which the truth was not queſtioned in one age, are ſtigmatized as fooliſh and abſurd in another. In the Scriptures, we ſee a religion of which one fundamental article hath not been changed, though it have now laſted for many thouſand years. The Chriſtian worſhips the ſame God, confides in the ſame Mediator, obeys the ſame moral precepts, and expects the ſame immortality,

mortality, as the Israelite did in the wilderness, or the patriarch before the flood.

In a collection of the writings of authors, who lived in very distant ages, and different states of society, it is impossible that there should not be several contradictions, if the subject of which they treat be the same. Their capacities, their modes of life, their information, their views, their dispositions, being exceedingly diversified, it could not be expected, that if permitted to give free scope to their thoughts, they would, in every point, exactly agree. The Bible consists of the writings of men, who appeared in very distant periods of the world; for from Moses the first, to John the last of them, there is a long interval of more than fifteen hundred years. The writers, consequently, lived in very different states of society, and were familiarized to very different manners and opinions. As man is, in a great degree, the creature of his circumstances; as his soul receives impressions from surrounding objects, and takes the form of the situation in which he is placed, their views of many subjects must have been various, like the modes of thinking which prevailed in the times when they flourished.

ed. Hence we might have looked for the ſame diverſity on the ſubject of religion. It was natural that the ideas of the more early writers ſhould be rude and inaccurate, when compared with the ideas of thoſe who lived in a more enlightened and refined ſtate of ſociety; and that their repreſentations of the divine Being, and the nature of our duty to him, ſhould be accommodated to the manners and taſte of their contemporaries. Beſides, there was a ſimilar diverſity in their education and rank, ſome of them being princes and rulers, and others the loweſt of the people; ſome of them being learned, and others illiterate. The ſentiments of the great and the vulgar, of philoſophers and mechanics, uſually differ as much, eſpecially on abſtract ſubjects, ſuch as many of the doctrines of religion are, as the ſentiments of a poliſhed, and a barbarous age.

Notwithſtanding theſe conſiderations, from which we might have expected to find the Bible full of contradictions, we obſerve in it, with no ſmall aſtoniſhment, the moſt perfect harmony in ſentiment and deſign, though it contain the writings of more than thirty different authors. All

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the prophets agree in predicting a perſon, who, by ſome of them, is ſtyled the Meſſiah, and by them all is deſcribed as the Saviour of his people; and their ideas of his dignity, his humiliation, his ſufferings, and his glory, are in exact uniſon with thoſe which are detailed by the Evangeliſts. The whole of the New Teſtament, indeed, agrees with the Old, as being a fulfilment of its types, promiſes, and predictions. In the writers, whether of the former or of the preſent diſpenſation, we meet with the ſame repreſentations of the character and perfections of the Deity; the ſame plan laid down for the reſtoration of ſinful men to his favour; the ſame views of the nature and bleſſings of redemption, though in one place the language may be figurative, and in another place, plain; the ſame method pointed out of enjoying an intereſt in thoſe bleſſings; the ſame vices condemned, and the ſame virtues enjoined. The religion which they teach, is in ſubſtance the ſame; the only alteration which we obſerve, is in its external form; and for that alteration ſuch reaſons are aſſigned, as exempt God from the charge of mutability, and the ſacred writers from the charge of contradiction. In fact, the introduction of a

new dispensation having been announced by the prophets, not to overthrow, but to perfect the dispensation under which they lived, had not the ceremonial law been abolished, the New Testament would have been at variance with the Old; and we would have searched in vain for evidences of divine wisdom, in the continuance of institutions, which were become useless and unmeaning, because their end was accomplished. Some instances, indeed, in which it is pretended that the inspired writers contradict themselves or one another, have been industriously collected, and pompously displayed, in order to disprove the divinity of the Scriptures. As I purpose to consider the objection drawn from this topic in the next chapter, it is at present only necessary to observe, that the alleged contradictions do not affect the grand doctrines and principles of the Scriptures, but only some subordinate and less important matters; and that, after all, with a little diligence and attention, they may be reconciled.

It must be acknowledged, that a number of individuals, by a previous arrangement of their plan, and mutual communication in the course of executing it, may compose a work, which shall exhibit

hibit perfect unity of thought and design. It is certain, at the same time, that such an attempt could rarely succeed; and that, if they should endeavour to impose their work upon the world, as the production of one man, the fraud could hardly fail to be detected by some means or other. The harmony of the sacred writers cannot be suspected to be the result of a well-concerted scheme to give to a fable the air and the consistency of truth, because they lived, as we have seen, not at one time, but in different ages, and by consequence could be under no engagement to co-operate, nor have any common purpose to accomplish. They could never meet to contrive a plan, nor to give an uniform appearance to the parts which they had separately executed. As then they could not write in concert; as, notwithstanding the detached character and absolute freedom of the writers, (freedom, I mean, from the restraint which human authority, or a previous stipulation might have laid upon their thoughts), their works most perfectly harmonize; as it would be a proof of insanity to suppose that their harmony, since it could not be the effect of design, was the result of accident; is it not manifest that they were guided by one and the

the same Spirit, namely the Spirit of truth, who is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever? When the laws of nature are suspended in the moral and intellectual world, we have equal reason to infer an interposition of the Deity, as when there is a suspension of its physical laws. If then a number of persons, who would have differed much had they acted according to their native genius and dispositions, unite most cordially in all their views, we must consider them as in the present case subject to a supernatural influence, by which their minds are moulded and fashioned alike. Those pens which have described letters so exactly similar, must have been guided by the same hand; those instruments, which conspire to form so sweet a concord, must have been tuned by the same artist. The spirit of error and imposture could not, in such circumstances, have assumed the distinguishing attribute of truth, immutability.

VI. The last argument for the inspiration of the Scriptures, is founded on their wonderful, and I may add, miraculous preservation.

The sacred books of the Egyptians, the Chaldeans, and other ancient nations have perished, though

though no means were ever uſed to deſtroy them. The leaves of the Sibyl have long ſince been ſcattered by the winds *; and of her oracles, which were conſulted with ſuch reverence, and preſerved with ſuch ſuperſtitious care, I know not whether a fragment remain. Thoſe which are quoted by the fathers are clumſy fabrications of ſome Chriſtian, more zealous than honeſt. It is more than three thouſand years ſince the firſt of our ſacred books, and nearly two thouſand ſince the laſt of them was written; and yet not one of them, nor even, I may venture to aſſert, a ſingle ſentence of them hath been loſt †.

Very ancient books, it muſt be acknowledged, have come down to us through a long ſucceſſion of

* Vid. Virgilii Æneid. Lib. iii. lin. 441,---452.

† Large collections of various readings of the ſcriptures have been made by the induſtry of critics. But of theſe ſome are merely conjectural; others are abſurdly, in my opinion, taken from ancient verſions; others are trifling, as they relate to ſingle letters and accents, and are undeſerving, therefore, of the pains with which they have been gathered, and the pomp with which they are diſplayed; and the moſt important of them do not deprive us of one article of faith, nor eſtabliſh any hereſy or error.

of ages, but their caſe, when attentively conſidered, will appear to be very different from that of the Scriptures. Againſt theſe books no perſon had conceived any ill-will, nor did any man feel himſelf intereſted in ſuppreſſing them, becauſe they neither contradicted his prejudices, nor oppoſed any obſtacle to the gratification of his paſſions, and the ſucceſs of his ſchemes; whereas kings and emperors, both before, and ſince the coming of Chriſt, have been the determined enemies of the Scriptures, and have employed all their authority, and the utmoſt ſeverity of perſecution, to accompliſh their deſtruction. Antiochus Epiphanes, in the proſecution of his deſign to eſtabliſh the idolatrous worſhip of the Greeks in Judea, cauſed all the copies of the law which could be found to be burnt, and forbade, under the penalty of death, any Jew to retain the Scriptures in his poſſeſſion *. The furious perſecution of Diocletian commenced by an order to demoliſh the churches of the Chriſtians, and burn the Scriptures †. Biſhops and preſbyters were cruelly

* 1 Maccab. i. 56, 57.

† Vide Euſeb. Lib. viii. Cap. 2. Lactan. de mortibus perſecutorum, cap. 12.

cruelly tortured to conſtrain them to deliver up their ſacred books; and thoſe, who were overcome by fear or pain, received, from their more courageous and indignant brethren, the infamous appellation of *traditors*. Beſides, the luſts of men have in all ages been at war with the Scriptures; and the patrons of hereſies and errors have experienced them to be the chief impediments to the progreſs and triumph of their opinions. Their hand, to allude to the deſcription of Iſhmael, hath been againſt all ungodly men, who held the truth in unrighteouſneſs; and it was natural therefore, that the hands of all ungodly men ſhould be againſt them. A book which pronounced the wiſdom of the world to be folly, treated its moſt ſerious and important purſuits as childiſh and criminal, and branded with the odious name of vice its favourite indulgencies, was likely to be proſcribed with indignation, and perſecuted with unrelenting revenge.

Amidſt ſo many enemies, we could not have been ſurpriſed, if the Bible had ſhared the fate of many other books once venerated, and reputed divine, which have long ſince diſappeared. Surely, if it had been a work of man, its memo-

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rial muſt have periſhed from the earth. But of its preſervation amidſt the dangers which threatened it, we ourſelves are witneſſes. However earneſtly multitudes may have wiſhed to deſtroy a book, which thwarted their meaſures, and diſturbed them in the practice of iniquity, few have been ſo daring as to lay their ſacrilegious hands upon it; thoſe who have been guilty of this audacious attempt, have been diſappointed in their hopes, whether they aimed at its total deſtruction, or at the adulteration of its contents; and it remains to this day an object of veneration and dread to the very men, whoſe errors it condemns, and againſt whoſe evil ways it denounces the righteous vengeance of heaven. Notwithſtanding the triumph of Arianiſm, we ſtill meet with all thoſe paſſages, which were ever alleged to prove the equality of the Son with the Father; and though for ſeveral ages Antichriſt reigned in the plenitude of power, and enjoyed the moſt favourable opportunities, amidſt the groſs ignorance, and unſuſpecting credulity of mankind, to corrupt the Scriptures, we are able from them alone, without the aid of the writings of the fathers, to convict the church of Rome of apoſtacy, and

and to prove its peculiar doctrines and uſages to be falſe and ſuperſtitious. Not one jot or one tittle of revelation hath periſhed.

The care, then, of divine Providence with regard to the Scriptures is manifeſt. We ſee the hand of God preſerving them from all injury with inceſſant vigilance, becauſe they are a revelation of his will, and the only means, by which men can attain the true knowledge of him, and of the manner of acceptably ſerving him. The patronage which God hath afforded to this book is a teſtimony that he recognizes it as his own. Had it been a human compoſition, providence would not have lent its aid to make an impoſture paſs in the world as a genuine revelation from the Father of lights. "It is apparent," ſays an eminent divine, "that God in all ages hath had a great regard unto it, and acted his power and care in its preſervation. Were not the Bible what it pretends to be, there had been nothing more ſuitable to the nature of God, and more becoming divine providence, than long ſince to have blotted it out of the world. For to ſuffer a book to be in the world, from the *beginning of times*, falſely pretending his name and authority,

ſeducing ſo great a portion of mankind into a pernicious and ruinous apoſtacy from him, as it muſt do, and doth, if it be not of a divine original, and expoſing inconceivable multitudes of the beſt, wiſeſt, and ſobereſt among them, unto all ſorts of bloody miſeries which they have undergone in the behalf of it, ſeems not conſonant unto that infinite goodneſs, wiſdom, and care, wherewith this world is governed from above. But, on the contrary, whereas the malicious craft of Satan, and the prevalent power and rage of mankind hath combined, and been ſet at work, to the ruin and utter ſuppreſſion of this book, proceeding ſometimes ſo far as that there was no appearing way for its eſcape; yet through the watchful care and providence of God, ſometimes putting itſelf forth in *miraculous inſtances*, it hath been preſerved unto this day, and ſhall be ſo to the conſummation of all things *."

Theſe are the general arguments, which I propoſed to bring forward in favour of the inſpiration of the Scriptures. They are of ſufficient ſtrength to eſtabliſh this point, independently of any other proof; but when added to the particular

* Dr Owen's Reaſon of Faith, pag. 29, 30.

far arguments advanced in ſupport of the divinity of the Old and the New Teſtament, they compoſe a body of evidence, which cannot fail to remove the doubts of every candid enquirer, and to obtain his aſſent to the important truth, which it hath been the deſign of the foregoing chapters to illuſtrate and confirm.

CHAP.

CHAP. VII.

OBJECTIONS AGAINST THE INSPIRATION OF THE SCRIPTURES.

By the arguments in the preceding chapters, it may be expected, that a conviction of the divine authority of the Scriptures will be produced in the mind of every unprejudiſed and attentive reader. But though freedom from prejudice be indiſpenſably requiſite to an impartial inveſtigation of any ſubject in debate, and there be no qualification of which infidels talk and boaſt ſo much, even inſinuating, or boldly aſſerting, that they alone are poſſeſſed of it; yet there are no perſons in the world more evidently under the influence of prepoſſeſſion than they are, when any queſtion relative to revelation is diſcuſſed. Their prejudices are of two kinds, and may be properly term-

ed intellectual, and moral. Certain preconceived notions concerning the divine character and adminiſtrations, and the perfection of the human underſtanding, which are incompatible with the revelation contained in the Scriptures, and indeed, with the very idea of a revelation, determine them to reject it without taking time to ponder, with calmneſs and deliberation, the evidences in its favour. They think themſelves authoriſed to treat the evidences as inſufficient, without even waiting till they be laid before them; as a man may ſafely refuſe to hear arguments againſt axioms, or ſelf-evident principles, becauſe he is ſure that they muſt be ſophiſtical. They do not examine whether their preconceived notions be true; but aſſuming their truth as incontrovertible, they pronounce the doctrine which contradicts them to be falſe, and by conſequence, to be the offspring of ignorance or impoſture. But theſe are not the only, nor perhaps the ſtrongeſt prejudices by which the minds of infidels are warped. Thoſe which originate in the ſtate of the heart, in its inclinations and affections, are the moſt powerful, and contribute in an effectual, though imperceptible manner, to pervert the underſtanding. There

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are certain liberties in which men are naturally fond of indulging; mortifications for which they feel the utmoſt averſion and horror; pleaſures on which they ruſh with an impetuoſity, to which reaſon and prudence oppoſe their dictates in vain. If revelation reſtrain thoſe liberties, enjoin thoſe mortifications, condemn thoſe pleaſures, it is not ſurpriſing that it ſhould meet with an unfriendly reception. When it comes to claim the love and homage of the heart, it finds it pre-occupied. That infidels are naturally or conſtitutionally more depraved than other men, it would be fooliſh to aſſert, nor do I even believe that they are all licentious in their manners; but while the more ſober part, who are comparatively few, are miſled by the prejudices of the underſtanding, the conduct of a great majority diſcovers that their hoſtility to the Scriptures ſprings from the corrupt paſſions of their hearts. It is not difficult to divine, why the authority of a book, which inculcates the pureſt leſſons of virtue, is called in queſtion by the votaries of vice.

From the ſource of prejudice flow all the objections againſt revelation, which occur in the converſation and writings of infidels. Right reaſon

reaſon has little, or rather no concern in ſuggeſting them. Some of theſe objections it will now be proper to conſider, becauſe they frequently come in our way, and it is wiſe to have anſwers to them ready for the preſervation of the peace of our own minds, and the defence and honour of the truth. Living in the midſt of enemies, we ſhould have our weapons always in our hands. The objections are of two kinds. Some are intended to diſprove a divine revelation in general; while the more particular aim of others is to ſhow, that thoſe books, which Jews and Chriſtians receive as divine, are falſely ſaid to be inſpired. I ſhall take notice only of the chief objections; and from the eaſe with which they are repelled, the reader will be able to judge, how inſignificant the other cavils of infidelity muſt be.

I. The firſt argument againſt the inſpiration of the Scriptures, is founded on this general principle, that the light of nature is ſufficient to teach us our duty, and to conduct us to happineſs. If this principle be true, a revelation is unneceſſary; whence it follows, that as God does nothing in vain,

vain, the Scriptures were not dictated by his Spirit, but are the work of men, who have given to their own productions the name of his oracles. As this principle is the basis on which infidelity rests, and one of the chief causes why the authority of the Scriptures is so violently contested, we shall bestow some attention upon it.

By the light of nature, must be meant those discoveries of the perfections and the will of God, which are afforded by the works of creation and providence, in connection with the ability or power of unassisted reason, to trace those discoveries, and draw from them the proper conclusions. It is plain, that whatever inferences are deducible from the divine works and dispensations, if our minds be too feeble to deduce them, we are precisely in the same situation, as if we were not furnished with the premises; and we stand in need of a teacher, or a book to point them out to our attention. The objection supposes that every man in the world, may, by the exercise of his own faculties, without any assistance from others, acquire just notions of God, and his duty, and his final destination; for if this ability be possessed only by a few, a revelation is manifestly useful, and

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even necessary to the rest, whom their more enlightened brethren might neglect to instruct, and who might refuse to be instructed by them, because they were possessed of no authority, to which their equals, in all other respects, were bound to submit. Nothing could be more absurd, than to assert, in general terms, the sufficiency of the light of nature, as a reason why a revelation is not needed, while it is understood to be sufficient only for some individuals, endowed with extraordinary capacity, and favoured with uncommon advantages, for the investigation of truth. But that every person in the world, is possessed of the ability supposed in the objection, is so glaringly false, that no man will venture to affirm it, unless he be so grossly ignorant of the history of mankind, as to be unworthy of our notice, or so dishonest, as to advance as a fact, what he knows to be capable of an easy and complete refutation.

To prove that the boasted light of nature is not sufficient to conduct men to happiness, I might appeal to the instances of the Hottentots, and the natives of New Holland, who, in intellectual capacity and moral attainments, are but in a small degree superior to brutes. Perhaps it will be said,

ſaid, that the appeal is not fair, becauſe in thoſe tribes the powers of the human mind are almoſt extinguiſhed, having never been rouſed and improved by civilization. But if the light of nature be ſufficient, it is ſurely ſufficient for nature's children; and I know of none who ſo well deſerve this character, as thoſe, who, in their intellectual and moral features, are juſt ſuch as nature formed them, having undergone no alteration to the worſe or to the better by art, or by tradition. If we wiſh to judge of the ſtrength of unaſſiſted reaſon, in order to aſcertain whether it be ſufficient for all, let us obſerve its operations in the rudeſt ſavages.

If, however, the objectors mean, that the light of nature is ſufficient, only when men are poliſhed by ſcience and ſocial inſtitutions, they unwittingly grant, that to a great portion of mankind, it always was, and ſtill is inſufficient, and conſequently, that they need a revelation; and beſides, even with this limitation, its inſufficiency may be ſatisfactorily demonſtrated. It is a fact which cannot be diſputed, that no people, ancient or modern, who had no other light but that of nature to guide them in their reſearches, have attained to the

the true knowledge and pure profeſſion of the unity of God; or have formed ſuch notions of his worſhip, as were ſuitable to his majeſty, holineſs, and ſpirituality; or have compoſed a complete ſyſtem of morality, founded on juſt principles, and enforced by ſanctions of ſuch efficacy, as to enſure obedience to its precepts; or have eſtabliſhed by convincing arguments, the doctrine of the future exiſtence of the ſoul. The polytheiſm, the idolatry, the ſuperſtitious rites, the immoralities in principle, as well as in practice, the childiſh ideas on the ſubject of religion, and the doubts, with reſpect to a ſtate beyond the grave, of the Greeks and Romans, without controverſy the moſt accompliſhed of all heathen nations, are known to every perſon acquainted with the writings of their hiſtorians, poets, and philoſophers. Nay, a ſingle individual cannot be mentioned among all the men of learning and ſcience in the Pagan world, who ever held the truths of religion which are diſcoverable by reaſon, unmixed with contrary errors, or yielded to them an undoubting, unwavering aſſent. Read Cicero's firſt Tuſculan diſputation, and the concluſion of the apology of Socrates by Plato; and you will find

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these men, than whom antiquity produced none greater, speaking with hesitation on the immortality of the soul. Now if these things be as we have now represented them, why do we hear so much of the sufficiency of the light of nature, when a single instance, in which it proved sufficient, cannot be pointed out? One is at a loss to determine, whether the unmeaning declamations of infidels on this subject, best deserve the frown of disapprobation, or the smile of derision. It is surely most ridiculous, to talk of a power as sufficient to produce certain effects, though, in every trial to produce them, it have failed.

Perplexed with doubts, and sensible of the weakness of their reason, the Heathens themselves have acknowledged the need of a divine revelation. Hence arose those oracles so famous among them, which they consulted in cases of difficulty; and from the same source flowed the stories, so widely circulated, and so firmly believed, of the intercourse of their priests and legislators with the gods, from whom they received political and religious institutions. Pretences to divine revelation would not have gained credit, if a consciousness of ignorance had not created a desire for su-

pernatural inſtruction. It was not by the vulgar alone that this deſire was entertained and expreſſed. Philoſophers themſelves, on ſome occaſions, confeſſed the darkneſs of their minds, and ſignified their hopes that a teacher would appear, "to take away the miſt from their eyes." The words of Socrates, in a converſation with Alcibiades, on the duties of religious worſhip, in which he ſhews that men are very apt, through ignorance, to err, are truly remarkable: "To me it ſeems beſt to be quiet; for it is neceſſary to wait till we learn how we ought to behave towards the gods, and towards men. When," ſays Alcibiades, "will that time come? and who is he that will inſtruct us? for moſt gladly would I ſee this man, who he is. He is one," anſwers Socrates, "who cares for you;" but he inſinuates that his coming would be delayed for a time, and informs Alcibiades, that ſome preparation was neceſſary on his part *. It is impoſſible to aſcertain what was the preciſe meaning of Socrates in this ſingular paſſage. There is no ground for ſuppoſing it to be a prediction of Chriſt. But without enquiring whether he did or did not underſtand himſelf,

* Vid. Platonis Alcibiad. ii.

ſelf, we may confidently pronounce it to be expreſſive of a conviction entertained by the greateſt philoſopher in antiquity, of the neceſſity of a divine revelation. Is it not, then, very ſurpriſing, that though the Gentiles wiſhed for a revelation, ſome men ſhould now riſe up, and maintain that their wiſhes were fooliſh, becauſe they were able, without any foreign aid, to acquire a perfect knowledge of their duty, and of the means of attaining felicity? It is equally ſtrange as if a man in health, or rather a man, who in the delirium of a fever, ſuppoſed himſelf in health, ſhould tell another, who was ſick and dying, that his complaints were groundleſs, and his cries for a phyſician prepoſterous; for that he felt no pain, and needed no medicine.

Perhaps infidels will ſay, in proof of the ſufficiency of reaſon, that they can produce a ſyſtem of natural religion complete in all its parts, and ſupported by inconteſtible evidences. But to what cauſe ſhall we attribute their ſuperiority to the ſages of antiquity? Are they wiſer than Socrates, whom the oracle pronounced to be the wiſeſt of men; of a genius more ſublime than Plato; or more acute and penetrating than Ariſtotle?

ſtotle? Their modeſty, which, by the bye, is not commonly their moſt diſtinguiſhed quality, will make them decline the compariſon. Does nature now ſpeak with a louder voice, and are her leſſons written in more legible characters? Do the divine perfections ſhine forth with brighter luſtre, and is the duty of man more obviouſly, and ſtrikingly delineated? No; creation preſents the ſame aſpect, and proclaims the ſame truths at preſent as in former times; and reaſon hath not acquired any new power of inveſtigating them. But the circumſtances of our modern infidels, and of the philoſophers of antiquity, are exceedingly different. The latter felt their way amidſt the dubious twilight of nature, while the former walk in the ſunſhine of revelation. When an infidel boaſts of the clearneſs and extent of his ideas, on the ſubject of natural religion, he is a dwarf mounted on the ſhoulders of a giant, and vaunting that he ſees farther than a man of ordinary ſtature. He is a thief, impudently attempting to rival or eclipſe the ſplendour of another man, by a diſplay of thoſe riches, which he hath previouſly purloined from him. It is to the Scriptures that he is indebted for the greater

perfection

perfection of his ſyſtem. They have pointed out and illuſtrated the doctrines which it contains, and ſupplied the arguments by which it is confirmed. Of the truth of this aſſertion we need no other proof than the ſingle conſideration, that there never was a rational ſcheme of religion framed in any country, which was not enlightened by the goſpel. Now as the higheſt perfection of reaſon is connected, in point of time and place, with the propagation of the goſpel, it is agreeable to the dictates of common ſenſe to believe, that reaſon is indebted for its beſt diſcoveries to the aid of revelation.

Even though it were granted that reaſon is perfect, and can diſcover all that nature teaches concerning God and our duty; yet if we be in a fallen ſtate, depraved and guilty, as the Heathens themſelves have acknowledged, and an impartial view of the preſent moral condition of mankind will not allow us to deny, the ſame knowledge will not ſuffice us, which would have been ſufficient in a ſtate of innocence. We need to know whether God will pardon our offences, and on what terms he will pardon them; and it is manifeſt that on theſe points none can give us in-

formation but himself. No man can tell whether a king will forgive such of his subjects as have rebelled against his authority; and if he will forgive them, on what conditions he will grant them an indemnity, and receive them into favour, till he have proclaimed his intentions. The laws, under which those subjects lived before their rebellion, denounce punishment, but give no hope of mercy. On the supposition of a remedial scheme, or a divine interposition in our favour, there must be new duties incumbent upon us, of which the light of nature could give us no notice, because they are the result of a new dispensation. The objection, therefore, against revelation, founded on the pretended sufficiency of reason, is destitute of any force, because it falsely supposes us to be in the same condition in which we were originally placed; whereas the very light of nature, which is set in opposition to revelation, concurs with it in assuring us, that we have lost our primitive rectitude, and fallen under the wrath of our Creator.

II. It is asserted, that the Scriptures do not contain a divine revelation, and therefore are not inspired,

inſpired, becauſe they have been communicated to ſo ſmall a portion of the human race. It ſeems to thoſe who urge this objection, to be inconſiſtent with the goodneſs of God, the common Father of mankind, to confine his favours to one nation, or to a few nations, while all ſtand in equal need of them. But the Scriptures of the Old Teſtament were delivered to the Jews alone, who were as nothing in point of population, and accompliſhments, when compared with the nations around them; and the Chriſtian doctrine, though it breathe a catholic ſpirit, is not at preſent known by more than a fifth, or a ſixth part of mankind. It is, therefore, equally abſurd to conſider the Bible as having been dictated by the Spirit of God; as having emanated from the impartial and benevolent Author of the human race, as to ſuppoſe him to have created a ſun, which ſhould enlighten only one region, or at the moſt one quarter of the globe.

But this objection, though it may paſs with ſuperficial thinkers for an unanſwerable one, will be found on examination to be feeble and nugatory. Revelation preſuppoſes men to be in a fallen ſtate, in a ſtate of ignorance and depravity; for

for if they were ſtill in the ſame circumſtances in which their Creator placed them, they would need no other guide but the light which ſhines in his works, and that reaſon which he hath imparted to their minds. But if men be in a fallen ſtate, into which they muſt evidently have been brought by their own fault, they have no claim to any expreſſion of the goodneſs of God; if they have extinguiſhed or obſcured the light of reaſon, they have no title to expect that the abuſe of one favour will be remedied by the gift of another. It depended therefore on the ſovereign pleaſure of God, whether he ſhould grant a revelation or not; and if he did grant it, he was ſurely at liberty to do what he would with his own; to beſtow it on few, or on many, as ſhould ſeem meet to his wiſdom, which alone could determine what was fit to be done. A claim to an equal diſtribution can only be founded on equal rights, and would be arrogant and ridiculous, where no right exiſted in any of the claimants, and the diſtribution was perfectly gratuitous. To ſay, then, that the Scriptures are not a divine revelation, becauſe all men do not enjoy the benefit of their inſtruction, is to maintain that God is bound to exerciſe

exerciſe his goodneſs alike to all, at the very time when we proceed on the ſuppoſition, that all are deſtitute of a title to it.

If the argument, that the Scriptures are not from God, becauſe they have not been univerſally publiſhed, were good, it would likewiſe prove that he has no concern in thoſe diſpenſations, which none but Atheiſts will deny to be divine. Though God be related to every individual in the world as his Creator, and all men may ſay with truth that they are his offspring, we do not ſee him making an equal diſtribution of his favours in the courſe of his providence. All do not poſſeſs the ſame advantages of ſoil and climate. All have not the ſame degrees of ſtrength and beauty. All do not enjoy the ſame means of intellectual and moral improvement. Nay, to inſtance in that idol, which infidels wiſh to elevate on the ruins of revelation, all men are not endowed with the powers of reaſon in equal perfection. Some are born idiots; ſome are extremely dull and ſlow of apprehenſion; ſome are incapable of proceeding more than a few ſteps in the inveſtigation of truth, while others, when compared with them, ſeem to be beings of a ſuperior order. There would be the

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ſame propriety, therefore, in ſaying that reaſon is not from God, becauſe it is communicated in ſuch different portions, and to ſome, namely idiots, is not communicated at all, as that the Scriptures are not divine, becauſe there are many nations, to whom they have not been made known. We may even proceed a ſtep farther, and obſerve, that as it is by reaſon that we perceive the truths of natural theology, theſe, in conſequence of its inequality, muſt be perceived in very unequal degrees of extent and evidence, and in ſome caſes will not be perceived at all. The truths of natural religion, therefore, are not within the reach of all men, any more than thoſe of revelation; whence it follows, by neceſſary conſequence, that if the reaſoning in the objection be juſt, the former is not from God any more than the latter. But an argument which proves too much, proves in effect nothing but the heedleſsneſs of the perſon who advances it; and the Deiſt who urges this objection, overturns his own ſyſtem, in his zeal to deſtroy Chriſtianity. Perhaps moſt infidels will not be alarmed at this conſequence, as it is manifeſt from their conduct, that they hardly believe even the religion of nature, and that they feel the moſt perfect indifference for it; but

but every man, it is hoped, whose understanding and heart are not debauched, will tremble to employ such reasoning against the Scriptures, as leads directly to Atheism.

It is the greatest folly imaginable to call in question the divine authority of the Scriptures, because they have not been published as extensively, as in our opinion a divine revelation should be. It is arrogant to demand, that our views of what is right and fit should be the standard of the dispensations of providence and grace. Were we to sit down, and contrive a plan for the government of the world, it would be exceedingly different from that which is actually pursued. We would probably propose, in the overflowing of our benevolence, that all men should enjoy in equal portions reason, health, and the various necessaries and comforts of life; and we would exclude as a stain upon the workmanship of God, men emaciated with poverty, and loathsome with disease, and above all, beings in human shape, devoid of human understanding. We would resolve to remove every evil out of the universe, and to diffuse every where the greatest possible good. But this system of unmixed beneficence, as we would

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call it, is not realized. The world, as it is diſpoſed and managed by infallible wiſdom and unbounded goodneſs, preſents a very different aſpect. Now, if a plan of governing the world different from ours, and even contrary to it, be conſiſtent with the benevolence and juſtice of the Deity, may it not be equally conſiſtent with theſe attributes, that the knowledge and benefits of a remedial ſcheme ſhould be extended only to ſome? If we think it right, that, ſince ſuch a ſcheme is alike needful to all, it ſhould be univerſally publiſhed, let us remember, that, in other inſtances, our notions of what is fit and good are contradicted by that ſtate of things, which God himſelf hath ordained. And certainly, laying prejudice and paſſion aſide, infidels themſelves will acknowledge it to be unſpeakably better, that ſome ſhould enjoy a revelation, on the ſuppoſition of its neceſſity, which we have already proved, than that the whole human race ſhould be irrecoverably left in ignorance and miſery. Nothing can exceed the folly of refuſing a gift of ineſtimable value, and without which it is impoſſible for us to be happy, becauſe it is not preſented to others who ſtand in equal need of it.

III. It

III. It is objected, that the Scriptures are not a revelation from God, and by conſequence are falſely held to be inſpired, on this ground, that their divine authority is incapable of proof. As God does nothing in vain, we may be aſſured that he hath not made a declaration of his will, which could be of no ſervice to mankind, as no perſon could know that it had proceeded from him. This objection is founded on one of theſe ſuppoſitions, that a miracle is impoſſible; or that, though a miracle were wrought, we could have no certainty of it by any other means than the evidence of ſenſe, and it would therefore ſerve as a proof to thoſe alone who were eye-witneſſes; or that miracles are not ſufficient to prove the truth of a doctrine.

The firſt of theſe ſuppoſitions is ſo manifeſtly falſe, that we can with difficulty conceive it poſſible for any perſon ſeriouſly to make it. If the laws of nature were eſtabliſhed by God, and be in fact only the particular modes in which he is pleaſed to diſplay his power, he who wills that events ſhould take place in a certain order to-day, may will them to take place in a different order to-morrow, provided that there be a ſuffi-

cient reaſon for the change. But ſome men ſeem to labour under this childiſh miſtake, that becauſe we ſpeak of the *laws* of nature, there are in truth certain laws, which even the Deity himſelf cannot alter or ſuſpend: Or, if this abſurd and Atheiſtical idea be not the foundation of their arguments againſt the poſſibility of miracles, they muſt imagine that it is inconſiſtent with the dignity of the divine character to make any change in a ſyſtem once eſtabliſhed as the beſt; not conſidering that true wiſdom is diſplayed, not in pertinaciouſly adhering to a plan, whatever valuable ends might be gained by deviating from it, but in introducing ſuch alterations as new circumſtances may require. To ſay, that no cauſe could ever ariſe ſufficient to induce the Creator of the univerſe to ſuſpend or alter its laws, is not to reaſon, but to beg the queſtion in debate. It is at the ſame time to aſſert, that mere phyſical laws are of ſo ſacred a nature, that no moral end, however important in itſelf, or extenſive in its conſequences, could compenſate for the momentary infringement of them.

The ſecond ſuppoſition, that we could have no certainty that miracles were wrought, unleſs we had

had witneſſed them, is founded in the idea, that miracles are contrary to experience. Hence it is argued, that as it is not contrary to experience, that men ſhould lie, we can never be ſure that the reports of miracles are entitled to credit; or rather, that after balancing the evidence on both ſides, we are bound to conclude all ſuch reports to be falſe. This is the argument which Hume, with no great modeſty, boaſted, "would, with the wiſe and learned, be an everlaſting check to all kinds of ſuperſtitious deluſion, and conſequently would be uſeful as long as the world endures. For ſo long, he preſumes, will the accounts of miracles and prodigies be found in all hiſtory, ſacred and profane *." But notwithſtanding the triumph with which this redoubtable argument is announced, good reaſoners will not heſitate to call it a ſophiſm. A miracle is not contrary to my experience, unleſs having been preſent, when it is ſaid to have been wrought, I had the evidence of my ſenſes, that it was not wrought. It is not contrary to my experience, that a dead man roſe from the grave, and inveterate diſeaſes were cured by a word, ſeventeen hundred years ago; it

* Hume's Eſſays, vol. ii. pag. 124.

it is only different from what I experience at preſent, when it is confeſſed, that the age of miracles is paſt. The foundation, therefore, of this boaſted argument is falſe. To ſay that a miracle is different from my experience, which in plain language is to ſay, that it is an event different from any which I have ever ſeen, will no more prove, that it was not wrought, than the want of experience with reſpect to the freezing of water, in thoſe who live in hot climates, will prove that it does not freeze. The only effect which my want of experience can reaſonably have, is to prevent me from haſtily crediting the report of the miracle, and to make me inſiſt on the moſt ſatisfactory evidence. It is certain, indeed, that it is not contrary to experience, that men ſhould lie, for no perſon who has any knowledge of mankind, needs to be told that they lie often. It is, however, equally certain, that they more often ſpeak truth, perhaps a hundred times for once that they lie, and experience, therefore, is in favour of their teſtimony; that is, if we will judge by the ſtandard of experience, of the credibility of the teſtimony of others, as they ſpeak truth frequently, and lie but ſeldom, we will be inclined,

ned, in any particular inſtance, to preſume, that their word deſerves to be believed.

But, ſetting aſide this precarious and unphiloſophical mode of aſcertaining the value of teſtimony, we know that there are circumſtances, in which we may have the moſt perfect aſſurance of the veracity of others. For example, no reaſonable man would refuſe to give credit to teſtimony, if ſeveral witneſſes agreed; if there were no contrary teſtimony; if it were plain, that the witneſſes had no perſonal intereſt to ſerve; if it would evidently be their intereſt to be ſilent, or to maintain the reverſe; if in adhering to their teſtimony, they expoſed themſelves to all the evils, which men, in other caſes, moſt induſtriouſly avoid; and finally, if they ſealed it with their blood. "The falſehood of their teſtimony, would, in theſe circumſtances, be more miraculous than the event which they relate," though it were the greateſt miracle recorded in the Scriptures; and in this caſe, Hume himſelf allows, that they have a title to be credited *. It hath been already ſhewn, that the teſtimony of the apoſtles concerning Jeſus Chriſt, hath all the

* Hume's Eſſays, vol. ii. pag. 130.

marks of veracity; and it hath likewiſe appeared, that we have ſuch grounds for believing the miracles, ſaid to have been performed by the writers of the Scriptures, that we cannot deny them, without renouncing our reaſon. I ſhall, therefore, only add in this place, that the improbability of a miracle is diminiſhed, in proportion to the importance of the end, which is alleged as the reaſon of working it. If we be told of miracles wrought to prove that a bone is the bone of a ſaint, or that a certain image ſhould be worſhipped, we may diſbelieve all ſuch ſtories, not only becauſe the miracles are brought forward in favour of ſuperſtition and idolatry, but becauſe the occaſion is too mean for the interpoſition of the Deity. But the report of miracles wrought to atteſt a revelation which was ſo much wanted, and which is evidently calculated to promote the beſt intereſts of mankind, has no appearance of falſehood and impoſture; and we inſtantly perceive, that an interference, in a caſe of ſuch magnitude, is highly worthy of infinite wiſdom and benevolence.

But miracles, it is ſaid, are incapable of proving a doctrine; and we are not warranted, therefore,

fore, to receive any doctrine which is not demonſtrated by reaſon, or hath not been made known by an immediate revelation to ourſelves. It hath been ſagely aſked, What connection is there between truth and power? If this queſtion deſerved an anſwer, it would be eaſy to ſay in return to it, that in the caſe of men, there is no inſeparable connection between them, and that their power is often exerted in ſupport of error; but that the moral perfections of God aſſure us, that in his diſpenſations they are neceſſarily and immutably connected; or in other words, that his power is never diſplayed but in favour of truth. But this point requires more particular conſideration.

The aſſertion, that a doctrine cannot be proved by miracles, is very extraordinary. God may, in a viſible manner, as the caſe ſuppoſes, atteſt a perſon as a meſſenger from himſelf; and yet it ſhall be impoſſible to know the truth of the doctrine delivered by him, without ſome other evidence beſides this atteſtation. Here one would be tempted to exclaim againſt the unreaſonableneſs of infidels, did not one recollect, that in this notion they are too much patronized by ſome Chriſtian writers, who maintain, that miracles

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alone are not ſufficient to prove a revelation, and that we muſt likewiſe take into the account the nature, and tendency of its contents. Many plauſible things are advanced, with regard to the impoſſibility of diſtinguiſhing true from falſe miracles, in conſequence of our ignorance of the powers of nature, and of beings of a ſuperior order *. Though, however, all this were granted to be true, the miracles wrought in favour of the revelation contained in the Scriptures, would be ſufficient to demonſtrate them to be divine, becauſe ſome of them at leaſt, as the raiſing of the dead, were manifeſtly of ſuch a nature, as it is the prerogative of God alone to perform. But while I do not chuſe to affirm, that every true miracle was wrought by the immediate agency of the Deity himſelf, and am ready to allow, that in ſome inſtances, he might employ the miniſtry of angels, I deny that a true miracle can be performed by any created being, without his permiſſion and concurrence. For admitting that angels, both good and bad, are poſſeſſed of power to produce ſuch effects, as might appear to us miraculous,

* Clarke's Evidences of Natural and Revealed Religion, pag. 378,---384.

miraculous, I know no opinion which reflects greater diſhonour upon God than this, that he would ſuffer one of his own creatures, eſpecially a depraved and malignant creature, who alone would make the attempt, to ſport with the eternal intereſts of men, by performing ſuch works in confirmation of a lie, as they could not by attention and care, diſtinguiſh from his own interpoſition. This opinion deſtroys the moral government of the univerſe. If we be unable to fix the limits between the power of creatures and that of God, to determine with preciſion what they cannot, but he can do, we may be certain from the perfections, which we know him to poſſeſs, that he will impoſe ſuch reſtraints upon them, that we ſhall not be at a loſs, on a conſideration of the caſe, to diſcriminate the operations of devils, from thoſe of Omnipotence.

To obviate this argument we are told, that though we cannot determine from the miracles themſelves, whether they be the works of God or of Satan, yet their author may be diſcovered, by an examination of the doctrine, in behalf of which they are performed. But to omit other things which might be mentioned, it may be obſerved,

ſerved, that a revelation may contain doctrines above reaſon, doctrines ſeemingly repugnant to reaſon, doctrines, therefore, from the nature of which we can derive no aſſiſtance, in judging of the miracles wrought in atteſtation of them. Hence it is plain, that either miracles muſt be a ſufficient proof, or ſuch a revelation cannot be proved. In a word, if the notion, which we are now combating, were juſt, men could not certainly diſtinguiſh between a real, and a pretended revelation, and conſequently, though a genuine revelation were preſented to them, they would be under no obligation to receive it.

The only infallible criterion of a true revelation, it is ſaid, is the nature of its doctrines. But than this criterion nothing can be conceived more vague and indeterminate. It by no means follows, that a ſyſtem hath been dictated by divine wiſdom, becauſe the doctrines of which it is compoſed, are all agreeable to reaſon, and of a moral tendency. Notwithſtanding its excellence and utility, it may be the mere offspring of the human mind. On the other hand, a revelation may comprehend, as we have already hinted, doctrines which ſeem to be contradictory to reaſon, and which,

which, to perſons under the influence of particular prejudices, ſhall appear unfavourable to the ſtudy, and practice of virtue. It may require cloſer attention, and a more diſpaſſionate inveſtigation than can be expected from mankind in general, to perceive the wiſdom, and ſalutary effects of ſome ſupernatural truths. The nature of its doctrines, therefore, would be a very uncertain ſtandard by which to try a revelation. In ſome caſes, a work of man might be miſtaken for a work of the Spirit of God; and in others, an emanation from the Fountain of all intelligence and purity, might be ſtigmatized as an effuſion of folly and licentiouſneſs. It is eaſy to conceive many inſtances, in which the ſubject would be involved in inextricable confuſion and perplexity.

I have been the longer in refuting this hypotheſis, becauſe it is eſpouſed, as I have already obſerved, not only by infidels, but by ſome Chriſtians, who affect great accuracy in their ideas, but in this inſtance have, in my opinion, fallen into a dangerous error. For their ſakes I ſhall ſubjoin a ſingle remark, that to aſſert, that miracles alone are incapable of proving the truth of a doctrine

trine, deſtroys the argument from them, ſo often brought forward in the Scriptures, and repreſents the reaſonings of our Lord himſelf as inconclusive: "Believe me, that I am in the Father, and the Father in me; or elſe believe me for the very works' ſake." "The works which the Father hath given me to finiſh, the ſame works that I do bear witneſs of me, that the Father hath ſent me *.

IV. The ſuppoſed contradictions in the Scriptures furniſh another argument againſt their inſpiration. The Bible, it is alleged, cannot be the word of God, becauſe many paſſages in it claſh with each other, teaching contrary things, and giving ſuch repreſentations of the ſame facts in different places, as it is not poſſible to reconcile. This is a bold charge, and if it were ſubſtantiated, it would prove, not what infidels ultimately aim at eſtabliſhing, that a revelation is not neceſſary, but that the Scriptures are not the revelation which we need. Truth is one and the ſame, and from the God of truth, therefore, a book which contradicteth itſelf could not proceed.

In

* John xiv. 11. v. 36. x. 25. xv. 24.

In anſwer to this charge it might in general be obſerved, that no contradiction can be ſhown in the ſyſtem of doctrine delivered in the Scriptures, in the precepts which they inculcate for the regulation of our conduct, or between the Old Teſtament and the New. The charge of contradiction relates ſolely to certain detached paſſages, and to ſome matters of inferior importance, by which the ſubſtance or eſſence of divine revelation is not affected. But as it is undeniable, that the Scriptures could not be from God, if they contradicted themſelves in the leaſt things, any more than if they contradicted themſelves in the greateſt, it is neceſſary to deſcend to a more particular conſideration of the ſubject.

It deſerves attention, in the firſt place, that ſeveral paſſages of Scripture which are deemed contradictory, will be found to harmonize, when they are carefully examined, and their nature and deſign are underſtood. I ſhall give an example or two. When Solomon ſays, "Anſwer not a fool according to his folly," and immediately after, "Anſwer a fool according to his folly*;" he ſeems with the ſame breath to deliver two oppoſite

* Prov. xxvi. 4, 5.

injunctions. But attention to the reaſon, which he ſubjoins to each of them, will convince us, that they form not inconſiſtent, but diſtinct rules of conduct, to be reſpectively obſerved according to the difference of circumſtances. Again, we read that "the ſtrength of Iſrael will not lie nor repent; for he is not a man that he ſhould repent:" and yet God is frequently ſaid to have repented. Thus in the ſame chapter he is introduced ſaying to Samuel, "It repenteth me that I have ſet Saul up to be king *." The ſolution of this difficulty is eaſy. A change of counſel, which implies previous ignorance, or preſent weakneſs, or fickleneſs of temper, is nowhere attributed to God in the Scriptures. "He is in one mind, and who can turn him?" But he is repreſented as repenting, becauſe a change ſometimes takes place in his diſpenſations ſimilar to that which we obſerve in the conduct of men, when they have altered their deſigns. His repenting that he had made Saul king, is a declaration, in language accommodated to the ideas and feelings of men, of his intention to deprive him of a crown, which he had ſhown himſelf unworthy to wear.

With

* 1 Sam. xv. 29. 11.

With regard to thoſe paſſages which it may appear more difficult to reconcile, the ſeeming contradiction will in moſt inſtances vaniſh, if we keep in view the following remarks: That in the Scriptures, as well as in other hiſtories, the order of time is not always ſtrictly obſerved; that the ſame perſons and places have ſometimes different names; that in the caſe of years and numbers of any kind, round numbers are uſed, or an even number is put for another, which was in a ſmall degree deficient, or redundant; that periods of time, as for example, the reigns of kings, have different dates, a king being reckoned to have commenced his reign, either at the death of his predeceſſor, or when he was aſſociated with him in the government *. There are ſeveral other general rules for ſolving the difficulties of Scripture, which may be ſeen in the writers on this ſubject. I ſhall quote ſome caſes, in which one or two of the rules now laid down are ſucceſsfully applied.

I have ſaid, that the appearance of contradiction ſometimes ariſes from aſſigning to the ſame period different dates. I give the following example.

* Vid. Alphonſ. Turret. de Verit. Relig. Jud. et Chriſt. p. 296-7.

ple. In one place, Abraham is told, that "his ſeed ſhould be a ſtranger in a land that was not theirs, and ſhould ſerve them, and that they ſhould afflict them four hundred years *." But in another place, we read that the ſojourning of the children of Iſrael who dwelt in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years. "And it came to paſs at the end of the four hundred and thirty years, even the ſelf ſame day, it came to paſs, that all the hoſts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt †." The computation is made from two different eras. In the firſt paſſage, the time is reckoned from the promiſe made to Abraham of a ſon, or from his birth; in the ſecond it is counted from his departure, in obedience to the divine command, from the land of his nativity. I ſhall add another example which reſpects the commencement of a reign. We are informed that "in the three and twentieth year of Joaſh the ſon of Ahaziah king of Judah, Jehoahaz the ſon of Jehu began to reign over Iſrael in Samaria, and reigned ſeventeen years." But in the tenth verſe of the ſame chapter, we are told, that "in the thirty-ſeventh year of the ſame Joaſh, began Jehoaſh the ſon of Jehoahaz to reign over Iſrael in Samaria ‡." Now, if

* Gen. xv. 13. † Exod. xii. 40, 41, ‡ 2 Kings xiii. 1. 10.

if to the three and twenty years of Joash, mentioned in the first passage, we add the seventeen years of Jehoahaz, we come down to the thirty-ninth or fortieth year of Joash, when, on the death of Jehoahaz, the reign of Jehoash may be supposed to have begun. Yet it is easy to account why the commencement of his reign is fixed two or three years earlier, in the thirty-seventh year of Joash, when his father must have been alive, by supposing that his father admitted him as his associate in the government, two or three years before his death. This solution is the more probable, as we find, from the case of Jehoshaphat and his son, that in those days such a practice was not uncommon *.

Another rule, to which we should attend, in order to remove the apparent contradictions of Scripture, is, that the order of time is not always observed. According to John, Christ was anointed at Bethany, six days before the passover ‡. Yet Matthew takes no notice of that remarkable circumstance, till within two days of the feast †. The reason is manifest. It was at this time that Judas offered to the chief priests and elders to be-

* 2 Kings viii. 16. † John xii. 1. ‡ Matth. xxvi. 2. 6.

tray him; and the evangeliſt, intending to relate his treachery, returns to the event which prompted him to it. The rebuke which he received from Chriſt in the houſe of Simon, when he complained of the waſte of ointment, had irritated his proud, diſaffected heart, and inſpired him with ſentiments of revenge.

The mention of the unction of our Saviour, which was preparatory to his burial, naturally introduces another obſervation, which will be of uſe in removing difficulties, namely, that two facts may much reſemble each other, and yet not be the ſame. Though, therefore, while they agree in many circumſtances, they ſhould differ in others, it is through haſte and inattention, that we charge the Scriptures on this account with contradiction. The anointing of Chriſt ſix days before the paſſover, is evidently different from the anointing recorded in the ſeventh chapter of Luke. The two incidents agree, as both happened at table, and in the houſe of a perſon named Simon; but on conſidering the paſſages, they appear to have taken place at different times.

I may add, that no perſon of judgment and candour will ſuſpect a contradiction, becauſe the

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ſame ſtory is related by one ſacred writer, with a variety of circumſtances, which are not noticed by another. Two witneſſes do not contradict each other, though the evidence of the one be more minute and particular than that of the other, if they concur in the ſubſtance of their teſtimony. The omiſſion of a circumſtance, in the narrative of one evangeliſt, which is mentioned by another, does not imply that the circumſtance did not take place, but may be accounted for in various ways. Perhaps we may admit, that as inſpiration does not infer omniſcience, Luke, for example, did not know every particular, which was known by Matthew or Mark. Thus Mark relates that Jeſus rebuked the wind, on the evening of the ſame day, on which he had delivered the parable of the ſower *. Of this circumſtance Luke ſeems to have been ignorant; and knowing only that the two events had happened at no great diſtance from each other, in recording the ſecond, he expreſſes himſelf in general terms with reſpect to the time: "Now it came to paſs on a certain day, that he went into a ſhip with his diſciples †." If any perſon ſhould be ſurpriſed at the inſinuation, that

* Mark iv. 35. † Luke viii. 22.

that inſpired men might not be acquainted with all the particulars relative to the ſubjects of which they wrote, let him remember, that John, in his goſpel, ſpeaks with uncertainty of the diſtance, to which the diſciples had rowed, when Jeſus came to them walking on the ſea; and that Paul ſeems not to have been ſure of the number of perſons, who had been baptized by him in Corinth *. Other inſtances of the ſame nature may be found in the Scriptures †.

I ſhall take notice only of one other apparent contradiction, namely, the different genealogies of Chriſt by Matthew and Luke. Difficult as it may ſeem to reconcile them, the uſual mode is at once ſimple, and liable to no ſolid objection. Matthew gives his legal genealogy, tracing his deſcent from David by Joſeph, who was his reputed father, and by his connection with whom, he was accounted in law a member of the ancient royal family. But as it was neceſſary, that he ſhould be naturally, and not merely in a legal ſenſe, a deſcendant of the ſon of Jeſſe, Luke ſets down

* John vi. 19. 1 Cor. i. 16.

† Michaelis' Introductory Lectures to the New Teſtament, Sect. lxxxv. lxxxvi.

down his true genealogy, and proves that he was his lineal offspring, by producing a list of the progenitors of Mary his mother. That this method of reconciling the two evangelists is just, may be inferred from this consideration, that in Matthew his genealogy is carried up to David by Solomon, and in Luke by Nathan, another son of that illustrious prince; whence it is plain, that as both historians profess to shew the lineage of the same person, they trace it by different parents. It is not to charge them merely with not being inspired, but with a want of common sense, to suppose that they both seriously intended to give his genealogy by Joseph.

It must be acknowledged, indeed, that, in an instance or two, we meet with contradictions in the Scriptures, which cannot be reconciled without an alteration of the text. For example, we read that Ahaziah was forty-and-two years old when he began to reign. But his father died at the age of forty, and consequently, according to this statement, was two years younger than his son. This is absurd. On turning, however, to another book, we find that Ahaziah was only twenty-two years old when he ascended the throne,

throne, and might, therefore, in reſpect of age, be the ſon of Jehoram *. In one place, Jehoiachin is ſaid to have been eighteen years old, when he began to reign, and in another, to have been only eight years old †. In ſuch caſes we are ready to allow, that through the careleſſneſs or inadvertence of tranſcribers, an error hath crept into the text. One number hath been ſubſtituted for another. This conceſſion is not ſo derogatory to the honour of the Scriptures, as the inconſiderate zeal, which retaining manifeſt corruptions, attempts to vindicate them by arguments, which can only provoke the ſmile of an infidel. Can any thing be more fooliſh than to endeavour to reconcile the two paſſages concerning Ahaziah, by ſaying, that one of them gives an account of his age, and the other, an account of the whole period of the authority of the family of Omri, from which he was deſcended? Another hiſtorian, then, might aſſert without correction or explanation, that a certain king was three-hundred years old when he began to reign, becauſe

* 2 Chron. xxii. 2. xxi. 20. 2 Kings viii. 26.

† 2 Kings xxiv. 8. 2 Chron. xxxvi. 9.

becauſe three hundred years had elapſed, ſince his family mounted the throne. No perſon, I am ſure, would admire the accuracy, or the judgment of ſuch a hiſtorian; and we ought to beware of repreſenting, in order to ſerve a particular purpoſe, an inſpired writer as uttering things, which would be pronounced nonſenſe from the pen of any other man. While we admire the care of divine providence in the preſervation of the Scriptures, we do not affirm that all the tranſcribers of them were miraculouſly guarded againſt error. Various motives, among which a veneration for the ſacred books may be conſidered as having exerted the chief influence, contributed to render them ſcrupulouſly careful; but that they were under no infallible guidance, is evident from the different readings, which are diſcovered by a collation of manuſcripts, and the miſtakes in matters of greater or leſs importance, obſervable in them all.

A contradiction, which could not be imputed to the blunder of a tranſcriber, but was fairly chargeable on the ſacred writers themſelves, would completely diſprove their inſpiration. But the appearance of contradiction is no valid objection

jection to the divine authority of the Scriptures, even on this ground, that if a revelation were granted to mankind, it might be expected, that the harmony of all its parts would be manifeſt at the firſt glance, and that no unneceſſary obſtacle would be laid in the way of our receiving it. In the works of creation, and the diſpenſations of providence, which we know to be divine, we meet with ſeveral things apparently inconſiſtent with that wiſdom, and goodneſs, and juſtice, of which we ſee in other things the moſt glorious diſplays. Yet not only are we ſure in general that the ſeeming inconſiſtencies may be harmonized; but in moſt caſes we are able to give a ſatisfactory account of them. If in a few inſtances we feel ourſelves at a loſs to explain them, we oppoſe to them the clear deciſive evidences of the divine perfections, with which we are ſurrounded, and hope for the day, when our ignorance and doubts ſhall give place to knowledge and certainty. Since, then, there are apparent contradictions in the book of nature, let it not ſurpriſe us, that they likewiſe occur in the book of revelation. If, notwithſtanding apparent contradictions, the firſt book be confeſſedly from God, we cannot

not reasonably, on the same ground, call in question the divinity of the second. Though some of the difficulties which present themselves in it should baffle our endeavours to unravel them, yet the harmony, which runs through all its other parts, and the marks of its heavenly origin, which are manifest, almost in every page, will justify us in recognizing its authority, and submitting to be implicity guided by its dictates.

V. It is objected, that the Scriptures contain doctrines mysterious, and contrary to reason. Every thing in a revelation should be perfectly intelligible; and since reason is the gift of God, doctrines which contradict it cannot proceed from him, but must owe their existence to the folly, or the knavery of men. The objection consists of two parts, which we shall separately consider.

That there are mysteries in the Scriptures we do not deny; and we detest the baseness of those, who explain them away, or openly reject them, with a view to simplify Christianity, and recommend it to infidels. In the prosecution of their treacherous design, they strip it of all its peculiarities, and exhibit in its stead a cold, and com-

fortleſs ſyſtem of natural religion, dignified, for the ſake of form, more than any other thing, with the name of our Saviour. But the myſteries of the goſpel are the pretext only, not the real cauſe, why infidels ſtate themſelves in oppoſition to it; for in the religion of nature, which they profeſs to admire, there are difficulties as many, and as great, as thoſe of revelation. What do theſe diſputers think of a Being, who had no beginning, and who is no older now than he was at the creation, becauſe in his exiſtence there is no ſucceſſion? What do they think of a Being, who is preſent in all places, and yet is not extended; and who, though he be at the ſame time in heaven and on earth, is not partly in heaven, and partly on earth, but is wholly every where? What do they think of his certain foreknowledge of the actions of men, while the actions continue free, and the agents are accountable? What do they think of the exiſtence of moral evil, in the work of him, who being holy neceſſarily abhors it, and being omnipotent could have prevented it *? Theſe myſteries are as incomprehenſible as thoſe of the Trinity, and the Incarnation; and they

* Biſhop Watſon's Apology for the Bible, Letter X.

they are myſteries not of revelation, but of reaſon.

Every thing is full of myſteries. We cannot tell how our bodies were formed, and are nouriſhed; we cannot tell what our ſouls are, and how they are united to our bodies; we cannot comprehend the ſtructure of a worm, of a hair of our heads, of the meaneſt weed, or of a grain of ſand. What right, then, has any man to demand, that ſince nature abounds in myſteries, in revelation there ſhould be none? Shall revelation be the only work of God, in which there is nothing to aſtoniſh our reaſon, and humble our pride of underſtanding? Truly, ſince all his works are wonderful, it is natural to expect that revelation, the laſt and beſt, ſhould not in this reſpect be inferior to any of them. If the deſign of it be to inform us of the nature, the counſels, and the diſpenſations of God, it muſt contain many things, too high for us to underſtand; and when I conſider that all his other works are incomprehenſible, had revelation been perfectly level to my capacity, I ſhould have concluded that it was not his, becauſe it wanted his uſual ſignature. As the caſe now ſtands, there is a ſtriking

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analogy between nature and revelation. But if every thing in the latter had been plain and perſpicuous, they would have been totally unlike; and it is highly probable, that infidels themſelves would have been the firſt to exclaim againſt revelation, as too ſimple to have proceeded from infinite wiſdom; as comprehending nothing but what the human mind, without ſupernatural aſſiſtance, might have diſcovered, or contrived.

Perhaps, we ſhall be told with a ſneer, that it is abſurd to ſpeak of a revealed myſtery, becauſe as ſoon as a myſtery is revealed, it ceaſes to be one. This mighty objection has always appeared to me to be perfectly contemptible, and to be nothing more than a play upon a word. To reveal a thing may ſignify to give a complete diſcovery, a full explanation of it. In this ſenſe, what is revealed ceaſes to be myſterious, as a place ceaſes to be dark, as ſoon as it is filled with the rays of the ſun. Infidels, and their friends and allies Socinians, run away with this meaning of the term, and then boaſt of a victory; whereas nothing more is neceſſary to put a ſtop to their triumph, or to make it appear ridiculous in the eyes of all impartial perſons, than ſimply to obſerve,

ſerve, that to reveal a thing may alſo ſignify to make known, that ſuch a thing exiſts, without ſubjoining an illuſtration of its nature, and a ſolution of its difficulties; and that this is the only ſenſe, in which the myſteries of the Chriſtian religion were ever ſaid to be revealed. A fact may be publiſhed, while the cauſes of it, the circumſtances which led to it, and ſeveral things relative to its nature, remain unknown. Thus I know that vegetables grow, that food nouriſhes the human body, and that heavy bodies deſcend; but though I may ſpeak of theſe ſubjects in the language of ſcience, I underſtand little more than the facts. There are revealed myſteries, if I may be allowed the expreſſion, in the book of nature, as well as in the Scriptures.

But of what uſe, it will be aſked, are incomprehenſible doctrines? I anſwer, that if they were, in every ſenſe, incomprehenſible, if we could form no conceptions reſpecting them directly or indirectly, and could draw no inferences from them, they would be perfectly uſeleſs; and a queſtion would ariſe, whether a book, of which ſome of the contents were ſo nugatory, could be aſcribed to God as its author. But there are va-

rious important purpoſes, which myſterious doctrines ſerve. They humble our reaſon, whoſe boaſted powers are overwhelmed in the attempt to comprehend them; they accuſtom us to implicit ſubmiſſion to the dictates of infinite wiſdom; they inſpire us with reverence for that Being, whoſe eſſence and counſels are inſcrutable; they create in us a deſire for a better ſtate, where, if the limited nature of our faculties forbid us to hope for knowledge abſolutely perfect, we expect to enjoy many diſcoveries, which, in the preſent ſtate, we are not able to bear. But this is not their only uſe. Though after our utmoſt endeavours to underſtand them, they will continue inexplicable, yet knowing that they are, and poſſeſſing ſome general ideas on the ſubject, we may derive from them aid to our faith, and motives to quicken our devotion and obedience. Without the knowledge of the fact, that there are three perſons in the Godhead, not one juſt notion of the ſcheme of redemption could be formed; but all that is neceſſary to be known of that ſcheme, may be underſtood, though we have no conception of the mode, in which three perſons ſubſiſt in one numerical eſſence. The knowledge

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that the Son of God assumed our nature, and laid down his life for us, may create in our minds confidence in him, and convince us of the obligation upon us to love and serve him, though we be totally ignorant how his two natures are united in one person. It is inattention which leads some persons to imagine, that an incomprehensible doctrine must be useless. The cause of gravitation is unknown; but being assured of the fact by daily experience, we apply this law of nature, according to which heavy bodies descend, to many important purposes in life.

I proceed to consider the second part of the objection, in which it is asserted, that there are in the Scriptures doctrines contrary to reason; or to speak more accurately, the same doctrines, which we acknowledge to be mysterious, are charged with being irrational. In the present case, reason must signify the universal reason of mankind, or the reason of some individuals; reason, either in a corrupted, or in a perfect state. But to the universal reason of mankind, the doctrines to which the objection refers, are certainly not contrary, since thousands, among whom we

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can number not a few of the moſt vigorous and cultivated minds, have aſſented to them without heſitation. If ſome individuals cannot reconcile them to their reaſon, we have yet to learn, that their ideas are the ſtandard of truth. The reaſon of a Chriſtian or a Trinitarian has as good a title to decide this diſpute, as the reaſon of an infidel or a Socinian. It is not yet proved, to the ſatisfaction of all parties, that faith and orthodoxy imply imbecility of mind, and that genius and learning are the inſeparable attendants of unbelief and hereſy. Reaſon when corrupted, that is, when blinded and perverted by prejudices and falſe conceptions, may pronounce that to be abſurd, which is perfectly rational; but its decrees do not alter the nature of things, and will have no influence on the judgment of wiſe men. Now it is certain, that the reaſon of thoſe, who call the myſterious doctrines of the Scriptures irrational, it depraved, becauſe the reaſon of all men, as experience atteſts, is more or leſs warped by paſſion and intereſt, and hath evidently loſt that vigour and capacity, with which it was originally endowed. We do not, therefore, conſider the inconſiſtency of theſe doctrines with reaſon, in its degene-

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rate ſtate, as a proof that they are repugnant to reaſon, in its native purity and ſtrength.

Notwithſtanding the illiberal abuſe, with which ſome doctrines of the Scriptures have been treated, they have not yet been demonſtrated to be contradictory to reaſon. Attempts to prove them irrational, are founded in a miſconception, or an intentional miſrepreſentation of their nature; ſo that it is only neceſſary for their vindication, to give a fair and impartial ſtatement of them. Were it ſaid, that God is three and one in the ſame ſenſe, we might without ſcruple affirm, that a propoſition affirming a more palpable contradiction, could not be conceived. But though the enemies of the doctrine of the Trinity charge it with this abſurdity, it appears to be entirely free from it, when exhibited without diſtortion or diſguiſe. As laid down in the Scriptures, and taught by Chriſtian writers, it is this, that in one undivided eſſence, three divine perſons ſubſiſt; or that there are three perſons poſſeſſing the ſame eſſence, and equal in glory, power, and every perfection. From this view of the doctrine, it is evident, that it neither multiplies unity, nor reduces a plurality into one; or in other words, that it does not confound

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the ideas of one and three, predicating them of the ſame thing, in the ſame ſenſe, but preſerving the ideas perfectly diſtinct, it attributes them to God in different ſenſes, aſſerting the Godhead to be one in eſſence, but three in perſonal diſtinctions. It cannot be denied, that in an infinite eſſence, there may be diſtinctions, to which there is nothing ſimilar in ours, and of which we are unable to form any conception. If any man ſhould ſay, that ſuch diſtinctions are impoſſible, he would pretend to know what can, and cannot conſiſt with infinitude of nature and perfection.

VI. It is aſſerted that the Scriptures cannot be inſpired, becauſe many things in them are unworthy of God. Of this nature are thoſe deſcriptions which repreſent him as cloathed with the members and actuated by the paſſions of a man; certain precepts which ſeem to be immoral and inhuman, as the command to Abraham to offer up Iſaac, to the Iſraelites to borrow from the Egyptians, and to the ſame people to deſtroy the nations of Canaan; many of the laws of Moſes, and in particular, thoſe which are uſually termed ceremonial; and a variety of paſſages, which are

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ſaid to be trifling, obſcene, and cruel, and to imply an approbation of baſe and criminal actions.

I might content myſelf with referring to the authors who have treated of this ſubject, for an anſwer to all theſe particulars, a full conſideration of which would lead to a diſcuſſion far exceeding our limits. A few hints, however, may be given with a deſign to ſhew, in what manner theſe apparent difficulties may be removed.

When human members, and human paſſions, are attributed to God, the deſcription is evidently figurative, and is intended, through the medium of ſenſible ideas, with which we are familiarly acquainted, to aſſiſt us in conceiving his infinite perfections. If ſuch deſcriptions be ſuppoſed to be liable to abuſe; if they ſeem calculated to beget and cheriſh groſs conceptions of the Deity, as a corporeal and imperfect being; it ſhould be conſidered that the danger is obviated in other places of the Scriptures, where, dropping the language of metaphor, the inſpired writers give the moſt ſublime views of his infinite greatneſs and glory. It will be acknowledged by every perſon acquainted with the hiſtory of human opinions, that the Bible was the firſt book, which taught

taught the pure ſpirituality of the eſſence, and communicated juſt ideas of the immenſity and immutability of God.

The command to Abraham to offer up his ſon, will not appear objectionable to any perſon who reflects, that the power of life and death belongs to the ſupreme Governor of the univerſe, who may delegate it for ſufficient reaſons to another, or employ another as his miniſter to exerciſe it. The deſign of the command was important, namely, to try the faith of the patriarch, and to exhibit an example of cheerful, unreſerved obedience to all ſucceeding generations.

With regard to the command given to the Iſraelites to borrow from the Egyptians, I obſerve, that, according to the beſt critics, the word rendered *to borrow* may be tranſlated ſimply *to aſk*, and thus the difficulty vaniſhes. The ſovereign Lord of all had transferred a right to the property of the Egyptians to the Iſraelites, whom the former had long defrauded and oppreſſed. That they might be put in actual poſſeſſion of it, he directed them to make a ſimple demand from their neighbours, without ſubjoining any promiſe, or giving any expectation that it would be returned. If it

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ſhould ſeem improbable that an unconditional requeſt would be granted, eſpecially as it was the requeſt of ſlaves to their unfeeling and imperious lords, we have only to recollect, that the miracles wrought by Moſes were beginning to procure reſpect to the Iſraelites, and that according to the ſacred ſtory, "God gave his people favour in the ſight of the Egyptians."

The command to the Iſraelites to deſtroy the ſeven nations of Canaan is explained nearly in the ſame manner as the command to offer Iſaac in ſacrifice. When a nation hath forfeited by its crimes a claim to life, he who might ſwallow up the guilty by an earthquake, or conſume them by famine and peſtilence, may commiſſion another nation to be the inſtrument of his vengeance. If the command ſeem difficult, becauſe the Iſraelites could not obey it without feeling perſonal enmity, or being animated by a cruel and vindictive ſpirit towards the devoted victims, it ſhould be conſidered, that it was equally poſſible for them to act in this inſtance without improper motives, as for a magiſtrate, from a love of juſtice, and zeal for the public good, to order the execution of a criminal, whom he pities as a man. On the ſuppo-

fiction that ſome of the Iſraelites were enflamed by private reſentment, or a thirſt for blood, the blame was entirely imputable to themſelves. The divine command was not the cauſe of their malice and barbarity, but merely the occaſion of their diſplaying the bad diſpoſitions, which previouſly lurked in their breaſts.

The ceremonial law has been a copious ſource of objections. Were it agreeable to my preſent deſign, I might to every minute cavil return a particular anſwer; but I ſhall only preſent to the reader the following general obſervations.

No candid perſon will refuſe, that for ſeveral laws which now appear ſtrange, there might be weighty reaſons, of which we who are removed from the age of Moſes by ſo long an interval, may be totally ignorant. Such laws no man has a right to pronounce unworthy of God. Unacquainted with the circumſtances of the caſe, he cannot decide upon it without precipitation and imprudence. The wiſeſt actions not ſeldom ſeem fooliſh to thoſe who know not their cauſes and ends. It is eaſy to account for other laws, which careleſs and uninformed readers may look upon as trifling, by obſerving that they were enacted

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in oppoſition to the ſuperſtitious uſages of the neighbouring nations, and were intended to be means of preſerving the Iſraelites from idolatry. We may think it beneath the majeſty of God to forbid the Iſraelites to round the corners of their beards, and to wear a garment of linen and woollen, while we are ignorant of the reaſons on which ſuch precepts were founded; but as ſoon as we learn that both practices prevailed among the heathens, and were connected with their idolatrous worſhip, we perceive the propriety of the interference of the ſupreme Lawgiver in matters apparently ſo inſignificant *. With reſpect to other laws, for which we may be able to give no better account, it would be ſufficient to ſay, that of how little ſoever importance they might be in themſelves, they ſerved a valuable purpoſe by forming the Iſraelites to the habit of obedience, and thus inſuring the obſervance of the moral precepts. They taught them to revere the will of God in every inſtance, and to make it the ſole rule and reaſon of their conduct. I may add concerning the ceremonial law in general, that though we may not perceive in it, when viewed by itſelf, all thoſe marks

* Stillingfleet's Origines Sacræ, Book ii. chap. 7.

marks of wiſdom which we previouſly expected; yet in connection with the Chriſtian diſpenſation to which it was introductory, and conſidered as "a ſhadow of good things to come," it appears to have been an inſtitution admirably contrived for the inſtruction of the Iſraelites in that ſcheme of religion, the eſtabliſhment of which was the ultimate deſign of their ſeparation from the other nations of the world. It is chiefly in this connection that we aſſert the ceremonial law to have been worthy of God. If infidels overlook or deny this connection, this reference to another and a better diſpenſation, it may be eaſy for them to ſelect precepts, in appearance puerile and frivolous; but may not the wiſeſt ordinances and laws, by ſimilar miſrepreſentation, be exhibited in a ridiculous light? It is manifeſt injuſtice to judge of the ceremonial law according to our own arbitrary ideas of it, and not according to its own declared end and intention.

To the general charge, that ſome paſſages of Scripture are mean, ſome are impure, ſome breathe a ſpirit of inhumanity, ſome imply an approbation of baſe and criminal actions, I may return a general anſwer. Things may ſeem mean and trifling

trifling to us, which men in paſt ages were intereſted in knowing. What is mean in itſelf, may become relatively important, by being ſubſervient to ſome moral end, or introductory to ſome great tranſaction. Our ideas of meanneſs may be the effect of a falſe delicacy, the conſequence of our having fixed our attention and admiration on ſcenes of pomp and magnificence. The life of the patriarchs will be mean in the eyes of the man, who, accuſtomed to the artificial modes of a court, hath loſt all reliſh for nature and ſimplicity. When impure actions are recorded, they are ſet down, not as examples to be imitated, but as facts, which, on account of their connection with other facts, or of their conſequences, could not be omitted; and they are related in ſuch a manner, as has no tendency to corrupt the imagination, and inflame the paſſions. If modern refinement would throw a veil over ſome ſcenes exhibited in the Scriptures, it is a veil through which the objects might be ſeen, and would make a more dangerous impreſſion than is now made, when they are diſplayed without diſguiſe. Let any impartial perſon conſult his own feelings, and he will acknowledge this peculiarity, as reſulting from the

chaſte, and artleſs manner of relation uſed in the Scriptures, that the ſame actions, which in the page of a noveliſt, and ſometimes even of a hiſtorian or philoſopher would have awaked a train of ſenſual ideas, in the narrative of the ſacred writers, do not excite the ſlighteſt irregular emotion. Nothing but downright ſtupidity can lead any man to imagine, either that every thing mentioned in the Scriptures is approved, if it be not expreſsly condemned; or that all the incidents ſhould be dignified and ſublime. A conſiderable portion of Scripture-hiſtory is the hiſtory of common men, and common events; and differs from ordinary hiſtory only in this, that it was recorded by the expreſs appointment and direction of Heaven. It is a fair repreſentation of things as they happened; and we ought not to be ſurpriſed, therefore, that we meet with frequent diſplays of luſt, avarice, ambition, and cruelty. Theſe are recorded to vindicate the divine conduct in the puniſhment of individuals and ſocieties, and to adminiſter an uſeful leſſon to us on the depravity of human nature, and the odiouſneſs and folly of vice. The paſſages in which they occur could not juſtly be conſidered as unworthy of God, unleſs

unleſs he were repreſented as giving his ſanction to the immoralities related in them; or unleſs it were proved to be inconſiſtent with ſome of his perfections, to order the hiſtory of mankind in one age to be written for the moral improvement of following generations, and for the glory of his juſtice, goodneſs, wiſdom and patience, manifeſted in the diſpenſations of his providence.

VII. The laſt objection reſpects the ſtyle of the Scriptures. It is not ſo dignified, ſo elegant, ſo conformable to rule, as we might expect the ſtyle of a divine writing to be. We do not perceive in it the accuracy, the politeneſs, the energy which characterize ſome human compoſitions; and how then can the Scriptures, which in theſe reſpects are ſo much inferior to the works of man, be a revelation from God? Who can believe that they were dictated by the divine Spirit, or compoſed by his direction and aſſiſtance?

It is not neceſſary that I ſhould ſpend much time in anſwering this objection. Few are able to judge of the ſtyle of the Scriptures in the original languages, eſpecially in the Hebrew which hath long ſince ceaſed to be ſpoken; and thoſe who

who judge of it merely by translations, as many infidels do, are too unlearned, and on this question too ignorant, to be entitled to any regard. Yet even in translations the Scriptures are so far from appearing devoid of eloquence, that innumerable passages may be pointed out, which excel in beauty and sublimity every thing of the same kind, in the writings of profane authors. On this subject, every person who has ability and leisure may decide for himself. If it were proper to appeal to authorities, we could produce, in favour of the style and composition of the Scriptures, the opinions of accomplished scholars, with whom few infidels, if any, deserve to be compared.

It may be true, that the Scriptures are not written according to the rules of art; but it would betray the most deplorable folly to account this circumstance an argument against their divinity. Must God, when he speaks, carefully observe the laws of rhetoric laid down in the schools? Does he perceive any excellence in the artificial arrangement, and musical cadence of words? Are visible marks of human art necessary to prove, that a book was written by the inspiration

ſpiration of God? Perhaps ſome objector againſt Theiſm will tell us, that the world is not an effect of intelligence and deſign, becauſe the landſcapes of nature are not conformable to the preſent faſhionable ſtyle of laying out pleaſure-grounds; the mountains are not regular figures; and the rocks are not diſpoſed according to the orders of architecture. This objection would be as good in favour of atheiſm, as that which we are at preſent conſidering is, in favour of infidelity. Beſides, the rules of rhetoric, of which pedants are perpetually talking, were drawn from models, exhibited in the writings of authors, who lived in theſe weſtern parts of the world. They ſeem to us to have a foundation in nature. But let us travel into the eaſtern countries, where the ſacred books were written, and we ſhall find prevailing there, ideas of compoſition, totally different from ours. A ſimilar diverſity of taſte will be obſerved in the diſtant regions of the weſt, the north, and the ſouth. As it was impoſſible that the ſtyle of the Scriptures ſhould accord with ſo many different ſtandards, and as there was no good reaſon, why it ſhould be accommodated to the notions of a Greek or

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Roman critic, rather than of an Indian or a Chinese rhetorician, the mode of writing, which was common in the land of Judea, was adopted. He who does not consider the sacred books as the compositions of Jews, and as in the first instance addressed, for the most part, to their own countrymen, is alike regardless of the laws of sound criticism, and the dictates of common sense. Had the Scriptures resembled in their composition a Greek or Roman classic, we should long since have heard from infidels, that the proof of forgery was incontrovertible.

The ancients were of opinion, that if the gods should descend to the earth to converse with mortals, they would speak in the language of Plato. I differ widely from those admirers of the style of that philosopher. A style which admitted words and phrases not of vulgar use, and to the vulgar therefore unintelligible, which was too elevated, or too refined to be apprehended by uncultivated minds, would counteract the professed intention of a divine revelation. The Scriptures were not designed exclusively for philosophers and scholars, for persons of discernment and taste, but likewise for the poor and illiterate; and they

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are written therefore in a ſtyle, which learned and unlearned can underſtand. If the former be diſpleaſed, that truth appears in ſo plain a dreſs, the latter have cauſe to rejoice, that no paint hides her native beauty from their eyes, no meretricious ornament conceals her ſhape or her features.

It is a proof of the divinity of the Scriptures, that they are not decorated with the tinſel of human eloquence. In reſpect of ſtyle, they are juſt ſuch, as, laying all prejudice aſide, we would expect them to be. It would be unworthy of God to ſpeak after the manner of an orator. He ſpeaks like himſelf, with majeſtic ſimplicity; he employs no arts to impoſe on our imaginations, and ſteal upon our hearts, becauſe his naked word is able to effect its purpoſe, without any adventitious aid.

I have now given a view of the chief objections againſt the inſpiration of the Scriptures. To theſe as to general heads all the other objections of infidels may be referred. The anſwers which have been returned to them will, I hope, be deemed ſatisfactory. Before concluding this chapter,

chapter, it is proper to obſerve, That when we are at a loſs for a particular anſwer to any objection, which may occur in reading or in converſation, we have a general anſwer ready in the evidences detailed in the foregoing part of *this* Eſſay. Being fully aſſured that the Scriptures are the word of God, we will not abandon our faith becauſe we meet with a difficulty, which we are not able to ſolve. An objection cannot diſprove a fact, or a truth clearly eſtabliſhed. If it follow from the arguments formerly advanced, that the Scriptures are inſpired, the concluſion ſtands firm and unſhaken, though there ſhould be ſome circumſtances, for which we cannot account. It is certainly abſurd to reaſon againſt luminous, and deciſive evidence. There is a point, at which oppoſition ſhould ceaſe, and aſſent ſhould be no longer withheld. Yet infidels, though the divinity of our religion, and of the books containing it, have been often proved by arguments, to which no ſolid anſwer was ever returned, continue to diſpute againſt revelation, as if nothing had been ſaid in its defence, and are ſurpriſed when their cavils do not prevail upon others to abandon it. But as it diſcovers ſoundneſs of judgment not to admit

admit a propoſition, till the evidence on which it reſts be laid before us; ſo to reject a propoſition, clearly and fully eſtabliſhed, indicates no uncommon prudence and penetration, but a diſeaſe or defect in the underſtanding, rendering it incapable of perceiving proof, and feeling its force; or the influence of ſome corrupt affection, prompting men to reaſon againſt their convictions. In the mean time, neither the impertinent cavils of unbelievers, nor thoſe real difficulties, which they are too quick-ſighted not to obſerve, and to object to us, ſhould overthrow our faith, or create heſitation and perplexity in our minds. They ſhould only quicken our diligence in the inveſtigation of the truth, and excite us to earneſt prayer for the illuminating grace of the Spirit.

CHAP. VIII.

CONCLUSION.

If the Scriptures be a revelation from God, and ſatisfactory evidence have been given of their inſpiration, it is incumbent upon all thoſe, to whom they are preſented, to receive them as divine, and to ſubmit to their authority. The caſe is not the ſame, as when we are called upon to embrace a ſyſtem of philoſophical or political opinions. We may be under no obligation either from duty or from intereſt, to decide for ſuch a ſyſtem or againſt it; it may be a matter of no conſequence whether we aſſent to it, or deny it. But not to receive the Scriptures, which are the words of eternal life, and have been announced by God himſelf to the world, as a revelation of his will, is at once to treat his authority with contempt, and to do the higheſt poſſible injury to ourſelves.

Infidels

Infidels may plead, that the evidence of their divinity is not ſo clear and convincing, as to be the foundation of a rational aſſent. Its ſufficiency or inſufficiency cannot be determined by their aſſeverations or by ours, but muſt be aſcertained by an attentive conſideration of its nature. It is certain that far leſs evidence is accounted ſufficient in many very important affairs, and that an unbeliever will riſk his fortune, and even his life, in an undertaking for the ſucceſs of which there is not half the evidence, which we have for the inſpiration of the Scriptures. Why is he ſo eaſily ſatisfied in the one caſe, but ſo delicate and ſcrupulous in the other? If he ſay, that when a greater intereſt is at ſtake, greater caution ſhould be exerciſed, we grant the obſervation to be juſt; but we maintain, that the ſtrength of the evidence in favour of revelation, bears an exact proportion to the ſuperior importance of the caſe; and we refuſe to accept of the apology as ſincere, becauſe no other part of his conduct accords with this affected concern for the welfare of his ſoul. Did he diſcover a deſire to know the truth, a ſolicitude to pleaſe God, a trembling anxiety with reſpect to futurity, a fear of every miſtake, and

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every action which might prove fatal to his happineſs, we might attribute his objections to the evidences of the goſpel, to a dread leſt he ſhould raſhly take a ſtep, which he would afterwards have cauſe to repent. But he who laughs at all religion, minds nothing but the preſent world, ſpends his days in the chace of pleaſures or of honours, and beſtows his whole attention and care on his body, inſults our underſtandings when he tells us, that it is from an apprehenſion of the conſequences in another ſtate of exiſtence, that he does not embrace Chriſtianity.

It is in vain that the adverſaries of the Scriptures allege in their defence, that even on the ſuppoſition of their divine authority, they are excuſeable in not receiving them, becauſe they cannot perceive the force of the evidence in their favour. We are told, that our underſtandings are not in our own power, and that if our minds happen to be ſo conſtituted, as to be incapable of diſcerning truths which are manifeſt to others, their dulneſs or incapacity may be called our misfortune, but ought not to be imputed to us as a crime. But the declamations of infidels, and ſome others, on this favourite topic, are looſe and inaccurate.

We ſhall not diſpute that the mind is paſſive in the reception of many of its ideas. There are certain propoſitions which ſhine with their own light, and convince all, whether willing or unwilling, of their truth. But there are truths, on the other hand, the perception of which requires attention, freedom from prejudice, a diſpoſition to learn, humility, and the abſence of vicious propenſities. If theſe qualities be wanting, the truth may not be perceived, but in ſuch a caſe the perſon is manifeſtly guilty. The evidences of the divinity of the Scriptures are very ſtrong; but it is poſſible for one to take a haſty or partial view of them, to liſten only to the arguments on the oppoſite ſide, to come to the conſideration of them, with a mind prepoſſeſſed by unfair and inſidious repreſentations of the ſubject, and to wiſh that one may find them not ſatisfactory. That a perſon, thus predifpoſed, was not ſatisfied, could excite no ſurpriſe. It would be manifeſtly his own fault, that he was not convinced; and his unbelief would moſt certainly be criminal. We hear much of the candour of infidels, not only from themſelves, but alſo from ſome who bear the name of Chriſtians, but betray the cauſe which

which they profeſs to defend. But ſetting aſide the proofs, which might be brought from the writings and converſation of infidels, that candour is a virtue to which they have no claim, at leaſt in oppoſing revelation, I beg the reader to conſider, that the Scriptures, to which we are now at liberty to appeal as an authority, aſſure us, that no man can be candid in rejecting the truth. They trace unbelief, not only to the darkneſs of the underſtanding, but to the corrupt paſſions of the heart. It is the offspring of pride, of vanity, of covetouſneſs, of ſenſuality. At the ſame time, they declare, that every honeſt and upright man, every man whoſe mind is purified from prejudice and luſt, if he be not already ſatisfied, ſhall finally be convinced, that the doctrines of the Chriſtian religion are divine. "If any man will do his will, he ſhall know of the doctrine whether it be of God, or whether I ſpeak of myſelf*." Infidelity is the effect not of phyſical, but of moral cauſes; it is not a misfortune, but a crime, and a crime, too, of an aggravated nature.

How much happineſs do infidels loſe by rejecting the goſpel? I know, indeed, that they are of the

* John vii. 17.

the contrary opinion, and that the Scriptures are represented by them, as impoſing a variety of ſevere and unreaſonable reſtraints. But the ideas, which they have formed of the unpleaſant and gloomy nature of a religious life, have no foundation but in the arbitrary aſſociations of fancy. Modes of life, which appear very inſipid, and even diſagreeable, have ſometimes hidden ſources of ſatisfaction, which cauſe them to be highly reliſhed by thoſe, who are actually engaged in them. It is analogous, therefore, to our experience relative to other things, that a virtuous life ſhould have charms, which more than compenſate for all the ſacrifices which it demands. It is worthy of remark, that none complain of the reſtraints impoſed by revelation, but thoſe who have not ſubmitted to them; we hear not a ſingle murmur from thoſe who have. Is not this a proof, that the ſeverity of religious diſcipline is wholly imaginary; and that ſuch a notion originates in a licentious, diſſipated turn of mind, which muſt diſqualify any perſon who is under its influence, for judging impartially of the evidences of the Scriptures?

Does the infidel boaſt of his pleaſures? The

believer

believer does not boaſt of his; but he is cheered and made happy by them, in the intervals of ſolitude, when the former experiences a dreadful vacuity, or his joys are ſucceeded by the ſtings of remorſe; in the ſeaſon of affliction, and the hour of death, when *his* paſt crimes, riſing like ſo many ghoſts from the grave of oblivion, encompaſs him with terrors, and an opening eternity preſents to his view the unutterable horrors of deſpair. What are the hopes of infidelity, even in a time of health and proſperity? It has none, except this poor, grovelling, fluctuating hope, that life will be protracted a little longer, and that to-morrow ſhall be as this day, and much more abundant. Whether there be a ſtate beyond the grave, it is unable with certainty to tell; it is afraid to enquire from a miſgiving of mind, which it ſtrives in vain to overcome; or if it ape the language of religion, and ſpeak of that ſtate with confidence and expectation, it is in thoſe moments, when its nerves are braced, its ſpirits are elevated, its blood flows with a full and regular tide, and the ſuppoſed diſtance of death allows the coward to put on the airs of a hero. The hope of the believer ſtoops to no ſublunary

lunary object, but terminates on felicity too great to be conceived, and too ſublime to be enjoyed in this ſtate of imperfection. He expects to triumph over death, to ſurvive the preſent ſyſtem of things, to prolong his pleaſures through an endleſs duration. His eye brightens, as he approaches the laſt term of life; he welcomes the pang of diſſolution. The infidel affects to pity the Chriſtian, but in reality there are moments when he envies him. The Chriſtian never envies the infidel, but at all times he thinks of him with the moſt tender pity.

The conſequences of rejecting the Scriptures, on the ſuppoſition that they are divinely inſpired, are ſerious and alarming. In this caſe the threatenings againſt the unbelieving and impenitent will be found to be no vain terrors, no bugbears contrived by prieſts to keep the ſilly, unſuſpecting multitude in awe. Infidels may make damnation their ſport, but by all their art they ſhall not be able to avoid it. It is ſurely a crime worthy of the ſevereſt puniſhment, to reject, to miſrepreſent, to ridicule, to revile a revelation ſtamped with conſpicuous characters of divine wiſdom and grace, and atteſted by wonders, which the arm of Omnipotence

Omnipotence hath performed. If the Scriptures be a revelation from heaven, the light of nature is not ſufficient. It is ſufficient for no man, whatever ſome may thoughtleſsly and unguardedly aſſert; it is manifeſtly not ſufficient for the infidel, who hath ungratefully, and contemptuouſly cloſed his eyes on a much clearer light. It cannot conduct any individual to happineſs; it leaves its deluded votaries in miſery. If the Scriptures be a revelation from God, there is only one method of gaining his favour and a bleſſed immortality; and that method infidels deſpiſe. They muſt, therefore, ſuffer the doom denounced in the goſpel. "He that believeth not the Son, ſhall not ſee life; but the wrath of God abideth upon him *."

Theſe remarks are ſubmitted to the conſideration of ſuch of the readers, as may unhappily have imbibed the principles of infidelity. Perhaps it is not ſo neceſſary to preſent to perſons of this deſcription evidences of the divinity of the Scriptures, as to endeavour to awaken in their minds ſerious thoughts, with regard to their immortal intereſts. Infidelity, I will repeat it, is not the effect

* John iii. 36.

effect of a religious ſpirit, rendering men cautious, in general, what they admit as the rule of their conduct, and, in this inſtance, unreaſonably ſcrupulous; it is the offspring of a perfect indifference to all religion, of a total want of concern about things inviſible and future. The moſt cogent arguments cannot be expected to convince, while the mind is diverted by the cares and pleaſures of life; but I ſhould not deſpair of the converſion of the moſt determined enemy of revelation, if he were once brought in earneſt to enquire how he might pleaſe God, and be for ever happy. He would ſoon diſcover that no religion but the goſpel can furniſh an effectual antidote to his fears, and a ſolid foundation of his hopes.

As the moſt of my readers will be perſons already perſuaded of the divine authority of the Scriptures, I ſhall conclude by addreſſing a few exhortations to them.

Firſt, Be thankful for the Scriptures. All the proofs of their inſpiration conſpire to ſhow you that it is an ineſtimable treaſure of which you are poſſeſſed. The Bible is the word of God. It is "more to be deſired," as the Pſalmiſt ſays, "than

" than gold, yea, than much fine gold; it is ſweeter than honey, and the honey-comb *." It is the map which ſhews the road leading to the heavenly Canaan, and to the Zion above. It is our charter to the everlaſting inheritance; it is the guide of our youth, and the ſtaff of our old age. To the Scriptures we are indebted for thoſe views of the divine character which relieve and comfort us. They unfold the excellencies of our Redeemer, the wonders of his love, the immenſe ſtores of his grace, the attractive beauties of his example. They ſupply motives of the ſweeteſt, and moſt powerful nature, which engage our affections, and carry us forward in the ſervice of God, not only with pleaſure, but to a degree of perfection, which we could not have attained by a cold ſenſe of duty, or under the influence of fear. They ſet before us a law, righteous, good, and, through the aid of divine grace, eaſy, by obſerving which we glorify God, and promote the peace of our own minds. By their light, the horrors of the grave are diſpelled, and we deſcry beyond it another and a better world, where we ſhall enjoy repoſe after our toils, find a refuge from all the evils of life,

* Pſalm xix. 10.

receive the reward of our labours, and rise to the utmost perfection and felicity of which our nature is capable. Are you borne up under a load of sorrows? are you enabled to triumph over temptation? do you taste the delights, and feel the raptures of prayer, and holy meditation? when you languish, are your spirits revived? when you begin to faint, is your vigour restored? These are the happy effects of the doctrines, the exhortations, the promises, the examples of the Scriptures; and, as they are divine, the dictates of immutable truth and infinite goodness, the joys which they create, are not delusive, and the hopes which they inspire, cannot be disappointed. Be thankful, therefore, for the Scriptures.

Secondly, Be on your guard against the attempts of those who would overthrow your faith in the Scriptures. Persons engaged in this impious design have appeared in every period of the Christian church; but at present they are uncommonly numerous, and active. This, we are told, is the age of reason; and its claim to this high character is proved by hostility to all ancient institutions, whether civil or religious. Innovation is the order of the day; what is old, is instantly

pronounced

pronounced to be foolish and iniquitous, and the hasty productions of visionary and inexperienced projectors are hailed as the dictates of wisdom. We ought not, therefore, to be surprised, that the unusual fermentation of the human mind has given rise to endeavours to abolish Christianity, as well as systems of government. Let the danger to which you are exposed rouse you to vigilance and activity, in repelling the assaults made upon your faith. It was always necessary, that the friends of the gospel should know the grounds on which they believed it to be a divine revelation; but it is peculiarly necessary at present when the trial of their faith is uncommonly severe.

Study to be thoroughly acquainted with the manifold excellencies and uses of the Scriptures, of which a slight view hath been given in the preceding exhortation. It is not to be wondered at, that they who hardly know any thing about the Scriptures but their name, should be easily persuaded to renounce them. Like a blind man, they throw away a diamond which they mistake for a pebble. But that man will not so easily part with them, who hath experienced the benefit of their instructions, and counsels, on many important

portant occasions; and into whose wounds they have poured the oil and wine of consolation. Infidels are all ignorant of the Scriptures; unacquainted with the letter, or with the spirit. Many of them have never read them, but have formed their opinion of them upon trust, from the misrepresentations, and sneers, and falsifications of their brethren in unbelief; and of those who have read them, we may safely say, what was said of Julian, that they did not understand them, because there was a veil of prejudice over their eyes.

Beware of the influence of the world upon your hearts, and of the prevalence of sinful dispositions. It is in the heart more than in the head, in the passions more than in the judgment, that infidels find the means of seduction. They would not, it is probable, have themselves been unbelievers, if they had not, in the first place, been lovers of sin; and their arguments would make few converts or none, if they were not assisted by certain inclinations, which the Scriptures condemn, but infidelity grants them full permission to indulge. "He that doth evil hateth the light."

Thirdly, Read the Scriptures with humility of mind. We are not required to believe their inspiration

ſpiration without evidence; but having once aſcertained this point, we ſhould be ſatisfied. All that remains is to act the part of humble diſciples, who are ſenſible that they are naturally deſtitute of ſpiritual wiſdom, and are willing to be taught by him, who cannot err. We muſt ſit down at the feet of Jeſus, and receive the law from his mouth. Our reaſon is no farther neceſſary than to help us to examine the evidences of revelation, to underſtand the meaning of the words and phraſes in which it is expreſſed, and to trace the connection of its ſeveral parts. To preſume to criticiſe the Scriptures, is, in effect, to deny their inſpiration; for criticiſm is not applicable to a divine production, but to a work of man, which may be compared to a ſtandard, and may be found to be inaccurately executed.

It would be arrogant to ſet out in the peruſal of the Scriptures, with a reſolution not to be pleaſed, unleſs we fully underſtand them, and be able ſatisfactorily to account for every thing. There are myſteries in revelation, which aſtoniſh and overwhelm our reaſon; there are difficulties, which human wiſdom will in vain endeavour to ſolve. Let us not be ſurpriſed and offended,

when ſuch things occur. Were we modeſt, did we conſider our own ignorance and weakneſs, we would look for them. Obſerving difficulties and myſteries every where, even in the moſt common and familiar objects, we would expect to meet with them likewiſe in the Scriptures. To wonder, therefore, when we do meet with them, and to complain of revelation as not ſufficiently ſimple, and perſpicuous, is to indicate that we had formed a very extravagant eſtimate of our intellectual powers. It is to wonder that we are not ſo wiſe as God; and that any thing in his nature and counſels ſhould ſurpaſs our comprehenſion.

Humility is the firſt leſſon, which is learned in the ſchool of Chriſt; the firſt virtue required in his followers: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himſelf." "Verily, I ſay unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye ſhall not enter into the kingdom of heaven *." If you will not read the Scriptures with humility, you will ſoon begin to doubt, and you will probably end in denying their divinity.

Fourthly, Be careful at all times to treat the Scriptures with profound reverence. They are the

* Mat. xvi. 24, xviii. 3.

the word of that Being, whoſe voice makes the pillars of heaven to tremble, and in whoſe preſence the loftieſt angels proſtrate themſelves with humility, and holy fear. To ſit down, therefore, in a light and thoughtleſs ſtate of mind to peruſe them; to read them with the ſame indifference, with which we would look over ſome idle ſtory, or unintereſting diſſertation; to ſuffer our attention to be diverted by every vanity which intrudes itſelf; to think and ſpeak of their contents with indecent levity and familiarity, is to offer an inſult to Him, whoſe will they declare, and of whoſe majeſty and glory they bear manifeſt ſignatures. We ſhould ſtudy to feel the ſame awe upon our ſpirits, as if God audibly addreſſed us. We ſhould endeavour to poſſeſs a compoſed and ſolemn frame of mind, ariſing from the conſideration, not only of their Author, but likewiſe of our intereſt in them; and leading us to baniſh every thought tending to counteract the impreſſions, which they are calculated to make upon our hearts. How holy and venerable, we ſhould ſay, is this book which we take into our hands? It was dictated by infallible wiſdom; it is ſanctioned by the higheſt

authority

authority in the univerſe; it is the law, by which we ſhall be judged; it is the meſſenger of life or of death.

In this place, I cannot forbear to warn the reader againſt the profane practice of jeſting on the Scriptures, or of introducing any of the ſtories and expreſſions which occur in them, to enliven converſation, and excite the laughter of the company. To hear jeſts of this nature uttered by an infidel would not ſurpriſe us; but how muſt every pious perſon be ſhocked, when they proceed from the mouth of a profeſſed friend of revelation! The wit, which conſiſts in an unſeaſonable application of the Scriptures, is not of difficult attainment, as is evident from this conſideration, that it is within the reach of almoſt any perſon, who chooſes to diſplay it. Accordingly we obſerve that the dulleſt, and moſt phlegmatic creatures, whoſe ideas and converſation are uſually ſluggiſh, and inſipid, are occaſionally able, by the help of the Scriptures, to produce among their fellows a momentary flaſh of merriment. The language of the ſacred books occurs without an effort; and when applied to ſome unexpected ſubject, it has a ludicrous effect, by the groteſque

mixture

mixture of majesty and meanness, of what is solemn, and what is familiar or trifling. It requires no greater dexterity to form such an association, than to expose a grave and respectable man to the laughter of the mob, by putting a fool's cap on his head, or by distorting and disfiguring his dress. Such wit, it hath been well said, a man of taste will despise for its vulgarity; and a good man will abhor for its profaneness. If there be jestings which are not convenient, those which have divine things for their subject, are without dispute among the number. A habitual belief of the presence of God, would make us afraid to sport with his words. That jest would better be spared, which, while it contributes to the amusement of irreligious companions, provokes the indignation of Heaven, and exposes the jester to a punishment, which will make him serious and sad for ever.

Fifthly, Remember that the Scriptures must be received with a divine faith. The arguments, advanced in the preceding chapters, authorise us to hold their inspiration; but the persuasion flowing from them is not properly *faith*, which is founded upon testimony, but *conviction* or *moral certainty*.

certainty. I acknowledge, that this distinction is not always observed, either in the language of theologians, or even in the Scriptures, in which persons are sometimes said to *believe* on the evidence of miracles; but the things themselves are clearly distinguished. Bare argumentation, or moral suasion is represented as ineffectual to produce that faith, which interests us in the blessings of the gospel, and applies divine truths to practical uses. The design of the foregoing reasoning is solely to prove that the Scriptures are the word of God, and ought to be believed; saving faith must be generated by some other means. When God, shining upon his word, discovers to us its intrinsic excellencies, those glories which a natural man cannot perceive, and makes our consciences feel his authority in it; when he says, as in the beginning, "Let there be light," and calls "the things which are not to be as though they were," a principle of faith is created in our souls. We are then disposed and enabled to yield to the Scriptures, not a cold and languid assent, but an assent, in which the heart concurs, embracing as good those doctrines, which the understanding discerns to be at once true, and worthy

thy of all acceptation. Let us say, therefore, in our prayers: "Open thou our eyes, that we may see wondrous things out of thy law. May God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, shine in our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

The knowledge of the Scriptures, which is the effect of spiritual illumination, will more completely secure you against the arts of infidelity, than all the arguments which have been brought forward to prove their inspiration. It is accompanied with an experience of the power and comforts of the truth, and no reasoning against the Scriptures, will persuade a man in opposition to his feelings. He who could not answer the philosopher's objections against motion, rose up, and walked. When the Christian cannot find a reply to the cavils of the unbeliever, he can appeal to the state of his heart. He hath the witness in himself, that the Scriptures are true. I cannot forbear to apply to the present subject, the following beautiful and apposite words: "Sceptics may wrangle, and mockers may blaspheme, but the pious man knows, by evidence too sublime

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for their comprehenſion, that his affections are not miſplaced, and that his hopes ſhall not be diſappointed, by evidence which, to every ſound mind, is fully ſatisfactory, but which, to the humble and tender-hearted, is altogether overwhelming, irreſiſtible, and divine *."

In the Sixth place, Make yourſelves familiarly acquainted with the Scriptures. As they were given by inſpiration of God, we naturally expect them to be, in all reſpects, worthy of his wiſdom and grace, and to be ſuited to the diverſified circumſtances and conditions of mankind. Accordingly an apoſtle informs us, that "they are profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for inſtruction in righteouſneſs; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furniſhed unto all good works †." They are a rich treaſury, from which all our wants may be ſupplied; they are a magazine, ſtored with every neceſſary for the ſupport and the defence of the Chriſtian. With what diligence and attention ſhould they be read? With how much care ſhould they be laid up in our hearts? Doctrines, promiſes, precepts, and

* Dr Beattie's Eſſay on Truth, Part. i. Chap. ii. 5.

† 2 Tim. iii. 16.

and examples, are of no benefit to us, while they remain in the ſacred books. They become uſeful, only when they are transferred into our minds, by reading and meditation. In the one caſe, they are as wholeſome, nutritious food placed before us; in the other, they are as food ſwallowed and digeſted. The Chriſtian who is not converſant with the Scriptures, muſt often be perplexed, and thrown into diſtreſs, like the mariner without his compaſs, when he hath loſt ſight of land. But a ſtore of ſcriptural knowledge is a ſource of manifold advantages. It enables us to detect errors, which artful men would impoſe upon us as truths, to anſwer the objections of adverſaries, to reply to temptations and overcome them, to regulate our conduct in every emergence, and to comfort ourſelves in the ſeaſon of affliction.

Laſtly, Let the Scriptures be the only rule of your faith and manners. They are entitled to this rank and dignity, from their fulneſs and perfection, and from the authority of him by whom they were dictated. The Holy Ghoſt, ſpeaking in them, is the ſupreme judge of all controverſies in religion. To his deciſion, therefore, all

our opinions, and thoſe of other men, ſhould be ſubmitted; and by his deciſion, whatever it may be, we ſhould abide. The law revealed in the Scriptures, is the only rule of our duty. No other law is obligatory on conſcience. Other men may be regulated by the traditions of their fathers, the decrees of the church, the peculiarities of a party, the whims and mandates of a leader; but we are bound to hear Chriſt alone ſpeaking in the Scriptures. By making them, and not any human creed, the ſtandard of our faith and obedience, we give them the honour to which they are entitled. We recognize their ſupreme authority, we acquieſce in them as the dictates of infallible wiſdom.

That union of Chriſtians, for which we all profeſs to long, will not be effected, till all parties, laying aſide prejudices, and diſclaiming human authorities, reſolve, in forming their religious principles, to conſult the Scriptures alone. When that happy period ſhall arrive, I am perſuaded that their ſentiments will harmonize much beyond what we can now prevail upon ourſelves to believe; and without harmony of ſentiment, experience aſſures us, that there can be no cordial co-operation.

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The Scriptures are "a light ſhining in a dark place, to which we do well to take heed, until the day dawn, and the day-ſtar ariſe upon us." Happy are they who turn their eyes continually towards it. It will guide them ſafely amidſt the devious paths of life, and bring them to that bleſſed world, where every cloud ſhall be diſpelled, every doubt ſhall be removed, every enquiry ſhall be anſwered, and they ſhall "know even as they are known."

THE END.

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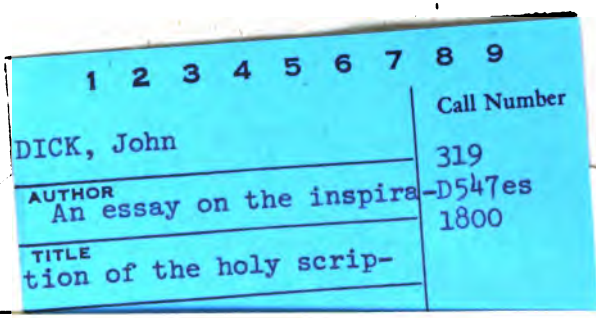

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